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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

City OF HATE

A Tony Quinn Mystery Novel
By G. WAYMAN JONES

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ROBERT WALLACE • NORMAN A. DANIELS • ARTHUR J. BURKS

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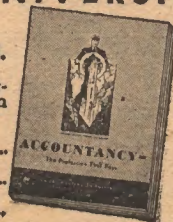
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXV, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

November, 1948

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



City of Hate

By G. Wayman Jones

When rivalry, chaos and intrigue suddenly explode in a welter of murder, the Black Bat is faced by the sternest mystery challenge of his life! Tony Quinn battles to solve the riddle of the Boltons 11

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second-class matter December 26, 1946, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by Better Publications, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), \$2.40; single copies, \$.20; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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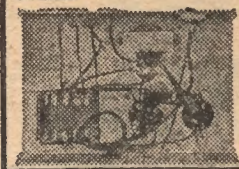
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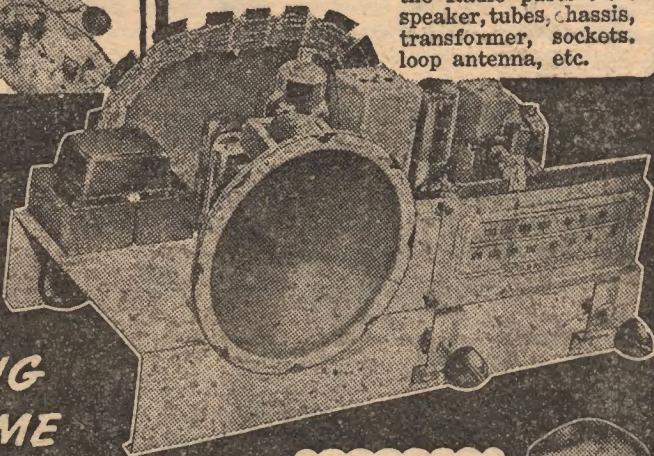


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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE name on the office door read merely Victor Dermont, without any designation of his business. The office was located far to the rear of the State Courthouse Building in an obscure corner. Victor Dermont was a quiet, friendly man, almost shy at times and yet, to this insignificant office and to this man came the most important officials, most of them with their hats in their hands.

Victor Dermont was the dominating political figure in this state. He made and broke men with a phone call. He sent aspirants whizzing high on the ladder to success and skidded them down again if they didn't measure up. He was scrupulously honest.

And then it happened.

A Mysterious Stranger

A stranger met Dermont as he was leaving his office with two acquaintances. The stranger was a weird looking character dressed in cheap clothing, shabby shoes and without a hat. He was scrawny, small and had a dead white face. A newspaper was suspended over one hand and the hand was thrust out, as if he wanted to sell the paper. He had watery eyes and there were pink feverish spots outlining his sunken cheeks. He looked like a man who didn't know enough to stay in bed and die.

The stranger drew back his lips. It wasn't a smile, but a snarl. "Good afternoon, Victor Dermont," he said.

Dermont seemed puzzled. "I'm sorry, I don't seem to know you."

"You are Vic Dermont?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm Dermont."

The stranger said, "I bring the respects of thirty-one guys. Nice guys, Mr. Dermont, though you wouldn't know about that. Yeah—their respects and mine."

He shook his arm and the newspaper fell away to reveal the fact that he held a squat, large calibre automatic in his fist. It made a noise like a small cannon.

"So long, Mr. Dermont," the stranger said.

He watched Dermont slowly fold up, clutching at his middle, until he stood balanced on the edge of the step and ready to fall over at any moment. The stranger pushed Linley, one of Dermont's acquaintances aside, ran up two steps and aimed his gun down at Dermont again. With rather remarkable precision he began pumping slugs into Dermont's back until the politician started his dive down the stairs.

This all took place in a matter of three or four seconds. Shocked crowds made no effort to interfere. Linley and Dr. Ross, the other acquaintance, were too stunned to move a finger.

The Laughing Killer

The stranger suddenly threw the gun away, lifted both arms as high as he could reach and began laughing. It was hideous, something spawned amidst devils and ghouls. He was still laughing when Dr. Ross leaped at him. He still laughed when the police arrived in droves and, much later, when they brought him to the morgue to look at Victor Dermont's body, he shrieked with laughter.

Even hard-bitten Captain McGrath of the Detective Division shuddered. In his thirty years as a cop he'd never heard anything like it. Even Tony Quinn, the famous blind Assistant District Attorney, didn't know what to make of it.

That's the exciting, puzzling beginning in the great new Black Bat novel to be featured in our next issue, **THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS**, By G. Wayman Jones.

Due for Death

Tony Quinn, with his able helpers—Butch, Silk, and lovely Carol Baldwin—soon learned that the name of the killer was Ernie Ward. He was a man who had been mixed up in a payroll robbery thirteen years before,

(Continued on page 8)

[illegible]

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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

and had been sentenced to life, for someone was shot to death in the holdup. But Ernie Ward had recently been released. When possible, it's the practice to free dying prisoners, and Ernie was due to die within a matter of days from an inoperable cancer.

Tony Quinn talked to Ernie in the prison ward of Bellevue Hospital. But he could get nowhere. The dying ex-convict grinned.

"Sure, I killed Dermont," he said. "I admit it, and I'll sign a confession. I knocked him off and I blessed every slug that ripped into his rotten carcass. Then I let the cops take me, and I just laughed at them. I'll be dead in a couple days. What does it matter?"

"It matters to me," Quinn told him. "Why not get it off your chest?"

"It don't worry me none, Mr. Quinn. My conscience is clear so far as bumping Dermont is concerned. You should have seen how surprised he was when I showed him the gun. The expression on his face. I pulled the trigger and thirty-one other fingers were on it too. Thirty-one, Mr. Quinn."

"Thirty-one?" the blind D. A. asked.

"Yes, thirty-one."

THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS, by G. Wayman Jones, is the most amazing Black Bat novel we've ever published. Packed with thrills, breathless action, and stark drama, it moves through a series of surprises to an amazing climax. It takes all the bravery and skill the Black Bat can muster to escape death for himself and for his loyal helpers!

Texas Thunder

Also in the next issue you'll find an unusual novelet—**THUNDER IN STONY FLATS**, by A. J. Collins. In case you're wondering, the thunder in the title doesn't refer to the loud rumble you often hear accompanying summer rainstorms, but to the explosive, booming sound of an oil well gusher coming in.

For Stony Flats is an oil section of Texas, and against this colorful and glamorous background is set the grim and bloody drama of men battling to the death for the wealth that lies below the surface of the land! **THUNDER IN STONY FLATS** is a corking yarn!

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(Continued on page 144)



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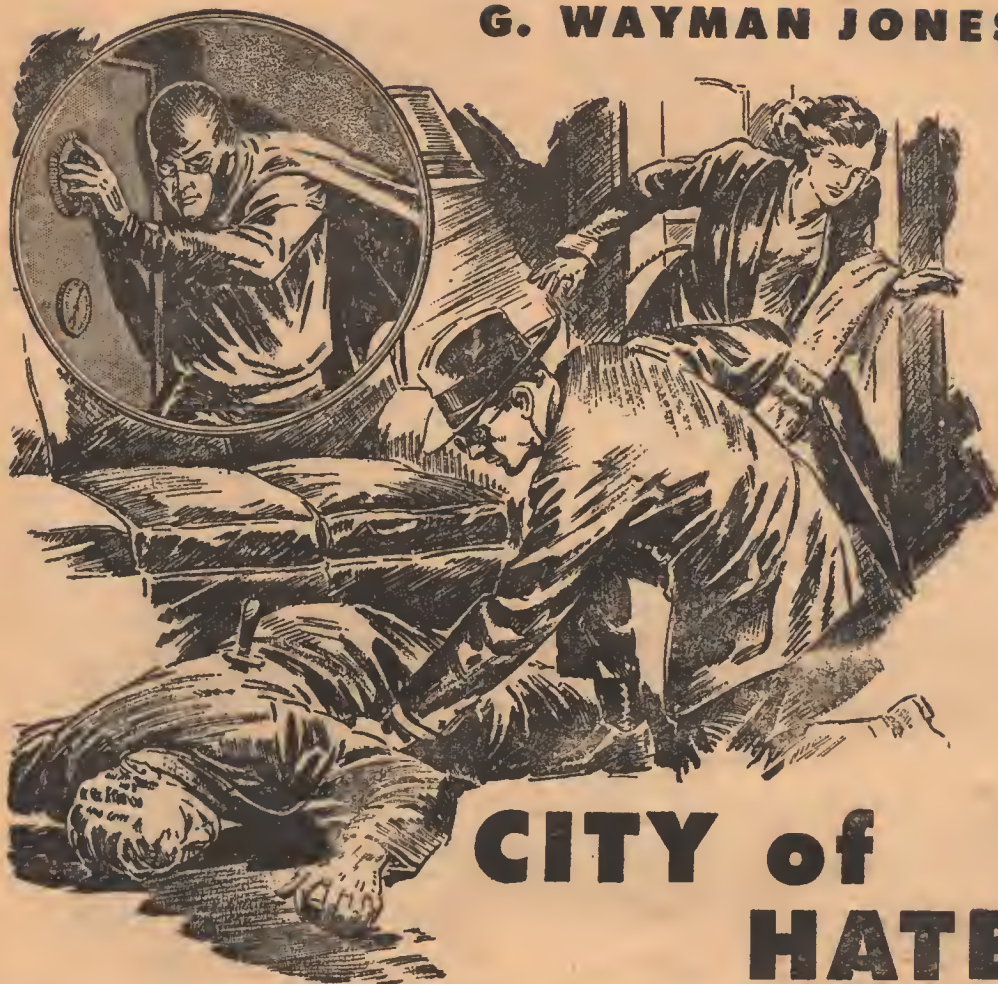
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a TONY QUINN novel by
G. WAYMAN JONES



CITY of HATE

When rivalry, chaos and intrigue explode in a welter of murder, the Black Bat is faced with the sternest mystery challenge of his career!

CHAPTER I: *Double Murder*

THE CITY of Norwood didn't sprawl as most of the upstate communities did. It was compact, tight, and bursting at the seams. The census in 1940 indicated a population of over a hundred and sixteen thousand, but the war had brought an influx

workers, many of whom never left. So Norwood was crowded, gay, brisk, and about as moral as any other manufacturing town of its size. And as unmoral.

The name of Norwood was a mistake. It should have been called Bolton or Boltonville or something of that nature.

For Generations, the Bolton Family Ruled the

Upon entering the city over a four-lane speedway, the first gray iron foundry encountered bore the huge sign, "*Bolton Metal Works*." Half a mile further a second large factory bore the name, "*Bolton Castings*." There were, all told, eight factories in Norwood which were owned, operated, managed and domineered over by Jonathan Bolton.

In the center square were two bronze statues. One was of General Ephriam Bolton who had done his bit in the Civil War and now sat permanently astride a bronze horse. The other statue was of Virgil Bolton, who occupied a bronze chair and had a bronze book in his lap. Enscribed on its base was part of a brief poem accredited to him.

The public library had been founded and built by a Bolton. The City Hospital's largest wing bore the name of Bolton. Everywhere a visitor looked that name seemed to be flaunted at him. So much so that every citizen of the town was sick and tired of the name.

But few ever expressed such an opinion. There was Jonathan Bolton to contend with, and J.B. wasn't just another citizen of Norwood. He was Norwood. Directly or indirectly, he controlled almost everything worth controlling. Some said he had no idea of his true wealth. Others said the first dollar he had ever earned was still at the bottom of the pile, intact and unspent.

The feeling for J.B. was not the same as that which people felt about other wealthy men. There was no envy, no covetousness for part of his fortune, no wondering why one man should have so much. The feeling for J.B. was pure and unadulterated hatred.

NO ONE ever called him anything but J.B., or thought about him in any other way than by those initials. He looked the part, too, of a man who might incur hatred. A fringe of red hair formed a monk's tonsure around an otherwise bald pate. He was solid, big, and as

strong as an ox. He could command with his eyes and, hate him or not, people jumped when he moved his little finger. J.B. was one of the last of that fast disappearing breed called tycoons.

At the moment he was entering the Bolton Building, Norwood's skyscraper, a building of twenty-odd stories of which J.B. used the upper seven as his main offices. There was a private elevator in the lobby, carpeted, mirrored, and spick and span. No one used it but J.B. Not that he ever heard about, at least.

Doors were opened for him. People spoke to him and bowed slightly. They made way for him, and he acknowledged all this with slight twitches around the mouth. He had a firm mouth, with lips that were neither thin nor heavy. His eyes were a startling blue, and filled with an eternal inquisitiveness.

He strode into his office. A clerk held the gate for him. The receptionist handed him a list of names—people who had phoned. His chief secretary was putting the final touches to an arrangement of asters on the big mahogany desk.

In his private office, J.B. sat down, took a deep breath, and plunged into work. He wasted no time, and expected that others would waste none either. Not the time he was paying for, at least. The office began to hum. J.B. consulted his list of appointments, flipped down the switch of his PBX.

"Miss Rosten," he said in a quiet voice, "I notice you have Leon Atkinson on my list for today. The final appointment. Cancel it. I do not wish to see Mr. Atkinson about any matter, important or trivial."

After he had worked until noon, lunch was brought in to him, hot and steaming. He ate while he conferred with factory superintendents and engineers. Nobody had ever known him to offer any one else a bit of lunch.

His day went by swiftly, for there wasn't a moment of it wasted. At five the

City of Norwood—Until Death Took Command!

employees departed. At five-ten his secretary, who stuck it out until J.B. went home, reported that Henry Ventres was on the phone.

"Tell him I do not wish to talk to him or see him," J.B. said tartly. "Today of any other day."

J.B. had peace, then, for about half an hour. He often claimed to do more work between five and five-thirty than during all the rest of the day. It was nearing six

portant, I should say."

J.B. merely sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"All right, Atkinson, you're here. You forced an entry. I might as well listen to what you have to say."

Atkinson walked toward the desk. He sat on the edge of it, allowing one leather heel to swing idly and kick tiny dents in the side of the desk.

"J.B.," he said slowly, "this is a day



THE BLACK BAT

when his office door burst open. Miss Rosten was valiantly trying to keep a tall, thin man from entering, but she couldn't stop his determination. He got by her, turned and pushed her out of the room. Then he slammed the door and put his back against it. A slow grin began to take shape around his too-wide mouth.

"So you won't see me, J.B.," he said. There was no fear in his voice. It bore, instead, the intonations of gloating. "The Czar of Norwood refuses to talk to a man as important as he is. More im-

I've been working up to for many a year. I often wondered what I'd say, how I'd handle it. I've even rehearsed speeches—with gestures. But neither is necessary. The fact is this. I have just gained control of fifty-one per cent of the stock in Bolton Manufacturings."

J.B. was holding a pencil between his fingers. It cracked, with a sharp report that seemed magnified under the tension that filled the room.

Atkinson threw back his head and laughed. "It hits hard, doesn't it? I've been on the trail of that stock for cen-

turies, it seems. Now I've got enough to vote you out of power!"

J. B. AROSE, pushed his chair back with one foot and walked around the desk. Suddenly he seized the angular man by the throat, yanked him into a standing position, and swung a hard right. Atkinson yelled as the fist caromed toward his face. He screamed when it hit him flush on the nose and started blood flowing.

He used his own fists, but the blows he delivered were weak, and pounded against a body as hard as steel. J.B. hit him again, sent him reeling back to fall against a chair, knock it over, then tumble on top of it.

The office door opened and Miss Rosten carefully poked her thin, spinster face inside. She saw Atkinson covered with blood, trying to get up while J.B. advanced toward him with murder in his eyes. She hastily closed the door. It was Atkinson who was on the floor. If it had been J.B., she would have called the police. But it was not necessary.

She pressed one ear against the door. "Get up," she heard J.B. say softly. "Get out of here before I kill you. And use the other door."

Miss Rosten heard Atkinson get to his feet, knew that he carefully avoided coming too close to J.B., and reached the door to the adjoining office through which exit could be made to the private elevator.

"You'll be sorry for this!" she heard him say. "You'll be sorry, J.B., because I'm going to break you! I'm going to pull you down off that high horse. I can throw you out of Bolton Manufacturings and that means every factory in town that you have always controlled. I'm moving in and you're going out!"

Inside the private office, J.B.'s eyes narrowed. "In one minute, Atkinson, you won't be able to leave here without help. I mean it."

"You'll hear from me," Atkinson promised shrilly.

He hastily backed out of the room as

J.B. took a single step toward him. The door slammed.

J.B. suddenly looked a century older. He walked around behind his desk and made a phone call to a man who had sworn never to dispose of the stock he held in Bolton Manufacturings. Atkinson had not been bluffing. This man had sold out. A neat doublecross inspired by a tantalizing sum which Atkinson had dangled. The deal was to be closed at once.

J.B. hung up, leaned back, and passed one powerful hand across his jowls. He flipped the PBX lever. He said, "I've some work to keep me late. You may go home, Miss Rosten."

He switched off her protests, arose and paced the floor. J.B. was not used to being beaten. Not in anything, and here he was, whipped to a frazzle in what should have been the biggest battle of his career. Licked before he had even known a fight was on.

Of course Atkinson was not the only man behind this. Everyone was out to get him, J.B. They had tried it on his grandfather and his father, and been slapped down. J.B. groaned. He had become soft, had forgotten that a man in his position had to be on his toes every lifelong second of the day and night.

He finally turned off the desk light, slipped into his topcoat and put on his gray homburg. He opened the door to the next office to head straight for the private elevator. There were no lights on, so that when he stumbled against the corpse, he was thrown headlong.

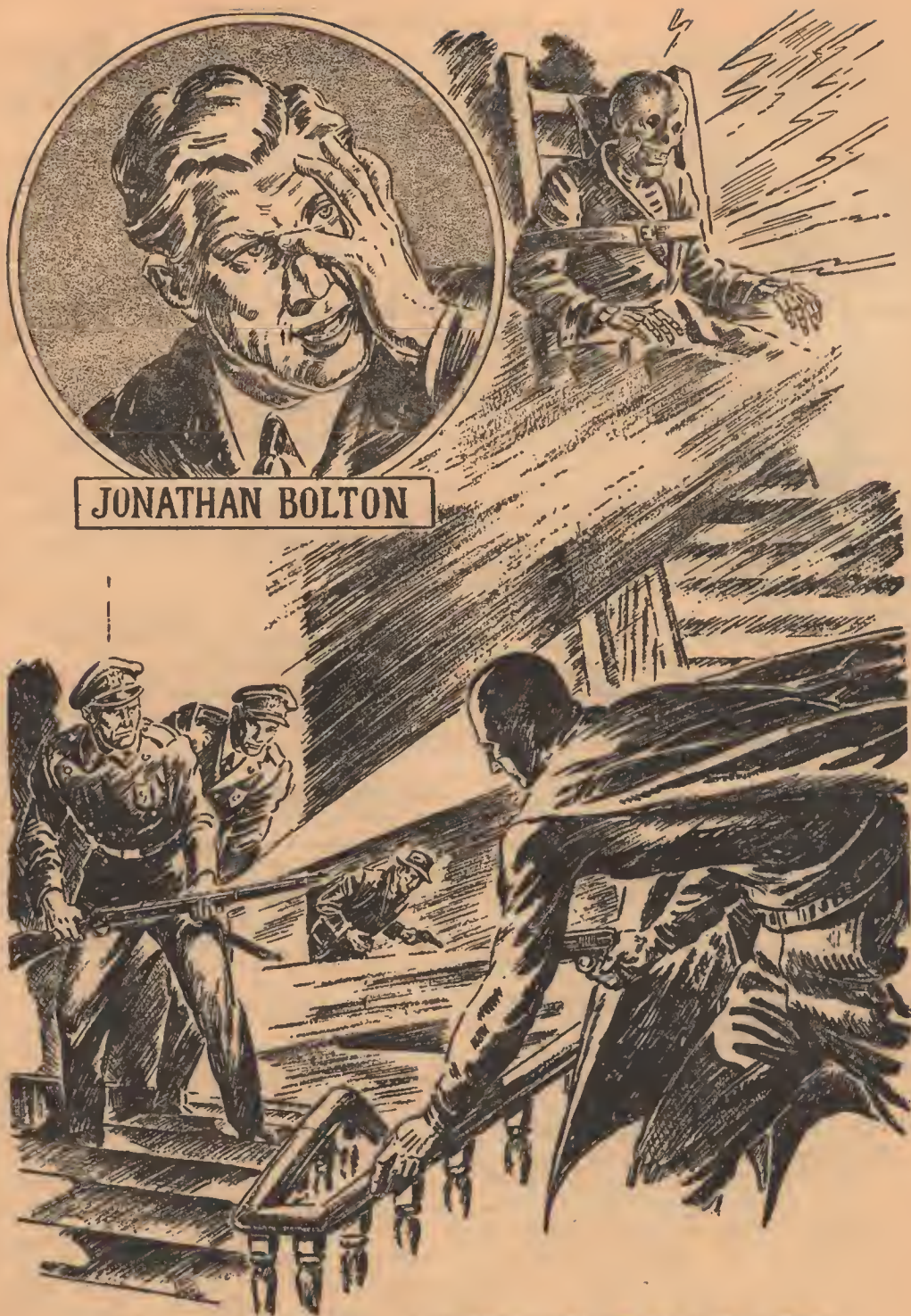
J.B. scrambled to his feet, leaped toward the light switch and turned it on. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Leon Atkinson lay there, half on and half off the leather divan. It was his out-flung arm over which J.B. had tripped.

He had been strangled, from the looks of this throat, and powerful hands had done the job. Hands as powerful as J.B.'s. At the thought he looked at his fingers and shuddered.

He sat down slowly, moistened his lips, and glanced toward the elevator



JONATHAN BOLTON



As the Black Bat leaned over the railing he saw two policemen standing with rifles at ready (CHAP. IX)

door. A thin slit of light came from beneath it. The car was on this floor. He made up his mind quickly. In a moment he was descending to the lobby. His car was out front, between two signs which stipulated there was no parking at any time of the day or night. The space belonged to J.B.

For the first time in his life J.B. felt that he needed help, and there was nowhere to turn. His attorneys could give him advice, true enough, but what advice could they give? Atkinson was dead in J.B.'s office, and J.B. had possessed a mighty reason for killing the man.

He drove through the crowded streets, making no acknowledgement of the salutes which traffic cops gave him. He reached the road leading to the fashionable suburbs and was within sight of his home when he first noted the car behind him, coming up fast. At first he thought it must be the police, but changed his mind. They would have used sirens.

THE OTHER car started to pass. There was a flash of flame from the front seat. Gunfire! J.B. twisted the wheel, felt tires bite into softer shoulders. The gun flamed twice more as the two cars became parallel. Then once again the gun was fired as the other car was passing.

J.B. felt no sudden white-hot pain, heard no bullets slap into the car, and he managed to get the sedan back on the highway. The other car was already almost out of sight and running without lights. J.B. slowed down and finally stopped. He felt of himself, leaned out of the car window, and looked at the side of the shiny limousine. Neither he nor the car had suffered any wounds.

He started up again, wary now for any more traps. The gates to his own grounds were wide open and he drove through. Halfway along the winding drive the wheels tripped an alarm system that notified J.B.'s elderly servant he was coming. Porch lights flashed on.

J.B. didn't stop. He drove right around the house and into the big garage. He

shut off the car lights, got out—and came to an abrupt stop. Someone was standing near the doors. A figure silhouetted in shadow. He couldn't make any sort of an identification. The figure pulled back its right hand. Something came whizzing at J.B.

He ducked, lost his balance, and fell. That something which had been thrown struck the wooden wall behind him and gave off a twanging sound. The figure in the doorway vanished. J.B. arose and saw the knife still quivering slightly, with its point imbedded in the wall. He shuddered, sprang for the lights and turned them on. Nothing happened.

He reached the back door and Thornton, his servant, let him in. Thornton was about seventy, impassive and bleak. If he noted that his employer was in a near frenzy, he made no mention of it.

J.B. went straight to the downstairs study, opened a desk drawer and removed a .38 automatic. He made sure a bullet was in the firing chamber and jammed the gun into a hip pocket.

He ate dinner. It tasted like straw, but he ate it. At least he could be doing something while he thought. It hardly made sense—the murder of Atkinson, then two distinct attempts on his own life. He knew he should notify the police, but he could hardly report one incident without reporting the other, and somehow he wasn't quite ready to tell about Atkinson's death. It involved too much.

At nine-thirty he was nursing a highball. It was a stiff one and when Thornton prepared it, he almost lost that icy reserve of his. It was the first time he had ever known J.B. to take a drink.

J.B. felt a little buzz from the liquor before he had it half down, but the alcohol soothed his nerves a trifle. It tasted good and felt good. He drank some more. Then he cocked his head slightly. Thornton, he was sure, had gone to his second-floor rooms and the noise J.B. heard was coming from the study at the rear of the house.

J.B. arose, put the glass down slowly,

and walked to the door. He snapped off the lights, drew the automatic from his pocket, and started down the gloomy hallway. But in his anxiety to make no sound at all, he brushed the arm of a tall, ornamental chair and it shifted position against the bare floor with a grating sound.

A man emerged from the study. He wore his hat brim low, his coat collar up. He glanced in J.B.'s direction and started running for the French doors at the end of the hall. J.B. raised the gun he held.

"Stop!" he called out. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

The man kept right on going. J.B. fired once. The man threw up both hands, kept moving for several more steps, then pitched forward. He fell with a crash that shook all twenty-nine rooms in the house.

J.B., gun ready, moved closer to the fallen man. He nudged him experimentally with his toe, then turned him over. It was too gloomy to see the face, so he lit a match.

J.B. felt the match burn his fingertips. He let them burn. There was not much feeling in him. The match actually went out of its own accord. J.B. arose. Lights flashed on. Thornton was coming down the steps, holding a funereal gray bathrobe close about his spindly body.

"Thornton," J.B. said, "go back upstairs and pack a small bag. Put into it bare necessities. Toothbrush and paste. Shaving equipment, headache pills. A fresh shirt and some socks and handkerchiefs. Anything you think I might need in jail."

"In jail, sir? You're joking, of course."

"I've never been more serious. Then phone my attorney and tell him to meet me at Police Headquarters immediately. After you do that, call the police. Tell them that Leon Atkinson is dead in my downtown office. And that Henry Ventres is dead—in my home."

J.B. was human. He proved it then and there. He had just made one of the biggest mistakes of his life.

CHAPTER II

Executive Orders



THE Governor's secretary came into the waiting room and said, "You're to go right in, Mr. Quinn, and you, too, Mr. Kirby."

The man in the big leather chair arose and extended a white cane slightly. He was tall, husky, and craggy-

facéd. There was character in that face, despite the fact that the eyes were dead and staring.

Tony Quinn smiled, thanked the secretary, and let "Silk" Kirby lead him toward the door of the executive office. Silk Kirby was an older man, slim, bald and almost ferret-faced. His blue eyes absolutely crackled. He led Quinn to the door, opened it, and they walked into the large office.

The Governor came toward them with extended hand. He grasped Quinn's which was stretched out somewhat uncertainly. Then he helped Quinn into a chair.

"It's good to see you again, Tony," he said. "And you, Mr. Kirby. Please sit down. I've a favor to ask of you."

Quinn grinned. "It sounds to me like trouble."

The Governor chuckled. "It is, in a way." He walked around the desk and sat down. "Odd, but when this was put up to me, I instantly thought of you. For one thing, I recall those days when you were not blind, were the duly elected District Attorney, and how you sent those big city crooks scampering."

"Thank you." Quinn acknowledged the compliment. "Those were good days."

"Ah—but they haven't ceased. When you were appointed a Special District Attorney, I felt they were back in full bloom, and I wasn't mistaken. How does it seem—in the saddle again?"

"Fine," Quinn said. "I can almost forget that I'm a blind man."

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. Tony, I've a story to tell you. About a man who is as genuinely hated as any mortal I've ever run across. He's extremely wealthy, powerful, and he's locked up for two murders."

"Jonathan Bolton," Quinn said promptly.

The Governor laughed. "You read the papers, I see."

Quinn chuckled. "They are read to me, Governor. My eyes are in Silk Kirby's head."

The Governor appraised Silk with a quick glance. "I doubt that much misses Mr. Kirby, Tony. Well, you know about the case then. Here is the problem. Bolton's trial comes up in two days. His attorneys have been screaming for a change of venue, for which I hardly blame them. But the courts have refused to grant this. So the case came directly to me. It is claimed that Bolton can hardly get a fair trial in a city where he is so detested, and that may be quite true. I naturally cannot supersede the courts and order a change of venue, but I can help to make his trial fair. I intend to appoint an out-of-town judge and an out-of-town prosecutor. Judge Thomas has been assigned to preside. I'm asking you to take over the prosecution."

"Why me?" Quinn asked.

"For rather obvious reasons. We need a fair prosecutor and you answer to that admirably. Further, we need someone who won't cash in on the glory he will accrue by sending Bolton to the electric chair. Assuming he is guilty, of course."

"And I fill the bill, sir?"

"Exactly. You see, Tony, the man who convicts Bolton will become a public hero to the townspeople of Norwood. It's a good-sized community with considerable political influence. I don't want anyone to profit from such a conviction."

Quinn nodded slowly. "I understand. Being blind, I cannot run for any civic office of great importance. Or I would

not, at any rate. Yes, I agree that I do fill the bill. Naturally I'll accept."

"Good. I knew you'd do it. I'm grateful. We simply cannot allow politics to take any part in this trial. And I know you will see to it that Bolton is prosecuted to the full extent of the law—not persecuted. You'll have to be careful in your selection of a jury. Convincing any residents of Norwood that Bolton is guilty could be done by merely pointing a finger at the man."

"He'll get a fair trial," Quinn promised. "I've always believed that any accused man is innocent until he is proved guilty. But of course, if the facts are there, I'll do my level best to send him to the chair."

"Of course." The Governor sighed. "And then it will be in my lap again without my being able to turn to anyone else for help. Well, it all goes with my office. You'll get your facts in Norwood, Tony. Right now I'm inviting you to lunch and a good long talk about those days when we batted those crooks all over the state. . . ."

IT WAS midafternoon when Silk Kirby piloted the black limousine toward the city. Tony Quinn, puffing slowly on a pipe, seemed to be deep in thought.

"It sounds routine to me, sir," Silk said. "Just one of those things."

Quinn didn't speak for a moment or two. Then he removed his pipe and tamped down the ashes.

"We've followed the case out of sheer curiosity and natural interest, Silk," he said then. "This man Bolton seems to be a weird character. He practically owns that city. He's brainy and shrewd, has proved that over and over again. Otherwise he would have slipped long ago. Now would a man of his intellect commit a pair of absolutely stupid murders? That fact has always stuck in my crop. It simply doesn't jibe with his character."

"Maybe not," Silk agreed half-heartedly. "But a man as hated as Bolton

probably has a mean streak in him six miles wide, and this time he blew up and killed before he realized the consequences."

"I doubt that. Because the murders were spaced about an hour apart. I don't know, Silk. But you can be assured we're going to find out."

Silk shrugged. "If you ask me, sir, the trial won't last more than a few days. Bolton is as good as convicted right now."

"Is he, Silk? I should be in the best position to judge that, and I'm not convicting him yet. As a matter of fact I think I'll send Carol and Butch up to that town to nose around. Get hold of them when we get back home. And Silk . . . Silk, look there to the left. That farm nestled back in those hills. There's the kind of a place I'm going to have some day."

"A farm?" Silk gasped. "You'd go balmy on a farm. To say nothing of what I'd be in two weeks."

Tony Quinn laughed and those dead-looking eyes of his suddenly became alive and glowing.

"You forget," he said amiably, "that we're getting older every day, and that some day we'll want peace and quiet."

Silk smiled a little. "It's Carol you're thinking about, isn't it?"

"Perhaps," Quinn admitted. "But I'm also thinking about the day when I can drop this pretense of being blind and live like a normal being again. That won't happen until I've quit the game and there's no longer any menace constantly waiting around corners for the Black Bat."

Silk's jaws closed firmly. He didn't like to think about such a future, let alone talk about it. He maintained a discreet silence which didn't fool Tony Quinn a bit.

Tony Quinn could really see. He had been blind for many long months and had been accepted as a blind man. When he had recovered his sight—and that had been accomplished secretly—he had preferred still to act like a blind man, and

be considered one.

It had started long ago, when Tony Quinn had been the elected District Attorney of his great city and zooming in the direction of the same executive mansion which he and Silk had just visited. Then some underworld characters, during the trial of a case, in striving to destroy evidence with a bottle of acid, had destroyed Quinn's sight, instead.

For a time that had felt like centuries, Quinn had sought a cure and had found none. He had resigned his position, taken refuge in the big city home he maintained, and was lucky only in the fact that he was wealthy enough to live in comfort.

When all hope of ever seeing again had died within him, a girl had come to him one day with a strange offer. Her name was Carol Baldwin, and her father was a police sergeant in a distant state, a man who had followed Quinn's career and had recognized in him a stout fighter against crime.

Carol's father had been dying of a wound inflicted by a gangster's bullet. He had offered Quinn parts of his eyes, and a little-known surgeon in that mid-western town had agreed to perform the operation. It had been successful, and had become the foundation for many other such surgical miracles since.

While Quinn had been waiting for the bandages to be removed, he had had plenty of time to think. One stipulation of Carol's father had been that Quinn should resume his battle against crooks if the operation proved successful. This Quinn had determined to do, but not by orthodox means. He had laid his plans carefully. Working with the law, he knew, often resulted in exasperating delays, red tape and legal trickery. Too many murderers and crooks went free through the work of clever attorneys.

PROPERLY to fight these men, the weapons used had to be their own weapons—violence, craft and cunning. They had to be fought by a man who was almost as much outside the law as they.

So Quinn had developed the identity of the Black Bat.

With his sight returned, he had set out to wage his grim war. But to shield his identity, he had told no one his sight had been restored and he had operated under the protection of a black hood. He still did. He also garbed himself entirely in black and the Undeworld had coined a name for him. Long since he had become known as the Black Bat, and he also had become a man whose life had been forfeited to the killers he fought. He was a man for whom the police held arrest warrants. Because the Black Bat killed when he was forced into it. He used any other illegal methods when they became necessary. Nothing stopped him.

And so Tony Quinn had become the greatest antagonist crime had ever encountered. There were certain things in his favor. During those months of blindness his sense of taste, smell and touch had become incredibly acute. Then, with the return of his sight, he had discovered that by some strange freak of nature he could see in darkness as well as in full daylight.

These things became decided assets. To abet them he studied criminology in all its forms. He built a secret laboratory in his own home and equipped it with every device needed by a criminologist to help in tracking down crooks.

Silk Kirby, of course, had become his right hand aide, since he had been with Quinn during all those months of travail. Silk, at one time, had been a confidence man, so smooth that he had been promptly decorated by comrades with the nickname he now wore. He was smooth as silk, too, even more so than he had been when he once had come to rob Quinn, and had remained to become his firm friend, thoroughly reformed.

Carol Baldwin, blonde and lovely, joined forces with the Black Bat, and she also knew his dual identity. Any qualms he had concerning a pretty girl as an impediment in this work, had quickly vanished for Carol had soon

shown she was resourceful and clever, and anxious to join in the fight against crime, as a monument to her father.

The fourth member of the little group was a hulking giant of a man named O'Leary. He probably had a first name, but even he must have almost forgotten it, because he was dubbed "Butch," and never called anything else. A trifle slow-witted, perhaps, he was still an able assistant. He was devoted to Quinn who once had done him a service he had never forgotten. He was without an iota of fear, and his enormous strength often was a decided asset to Quinn.

No one else knew that Tony Quinn could see, and was the Black Bat. Some may have suspected, as Captain McGrath of the Police Detective Division did, but there was no proof. If there had been, McGrath would have put Tony Quinn behind bars long ago. To McGrath, the Black Bat may have helped the law a great deal, but his methods were illegal, and anyone who broke the law was McGrath's meat.

CHAPTER II

The Black Bat Starts the Wheels



SILK DROVE the car through the city and finally turned into a quiet residential street. At the end of it was Tony Quinn's home, a large residence with a yard that was spacious for a city home. It was a dead-end street and the turn at the end of

it was a driveway to Tony Quinn's garage only.

Silk stopped in front of the house and Tony Quinn got out. Using his cane, he tapped his way to the white gate, passed through it, and up the walk to the porch steps. To anyone watching, here was only a blind man proceeding along a route familiar to him even in his blank world.

Quinn let himself in, closed the door, and hung up his coat and hat. Still gripping the cane, he moved slowly and mechanically to the library at the end of the hall. He never dropped his mask of being totally blind until he was absolutely certain that he could not be seen.

He sat down in a worn and comfortable leather chair before the fireplace, fumbled for his pipe and then for the humidor of tobacco on a small table beside the chair.

Soon he had the pipe going. He put his head back against the chair and puffed slowly while his mind revolved about the circumstances of a case that was going to prove as weird as any he had ever handled. And as dangerous.

For Tony Quinn was far from satisfied with the appearance of the facts against Jonathan Bolton. Yet, if the whole world had hated him as intensely as the city of Norwood did, Quinn would still have sought to prove the man's innocence if there was the slightest indication that he was not the murderer they charged him with being. . . .

Quinn had already put the wheels of his investigation in motion when, the following morning, Carol Baldwin piloted her small car over the hills which led to Norwood. With her was Butch O'Leary, bright-eyed over certain events which had taken place.

Carol was a girl of medium build, trim and attractive. She wore a gray tailored suit and a smart, though not striking, hat, because her credentials were those of a newspaper feature story writer. She wanted to look the part.

Butch was jammed into the front seat somehow. He had a massive face, a short thick neck. His hands were enormous. When they were clenched they became fists which could be as effective as a sledge-hammer.

He reached into his pocket and removed a leather case. This was the fifteenth or sixteenth time, as Carol counted.

As the open umbrella obscured the luminous figures on the clock, glass crashed and four shots rang out (CHAP. VI)



Butch opened the case and gazed spellbound at the shiny silver-plated badge clipped there.

He wagged his huge head from side to side and grinned widely.

"Me—a dick," he said, still hardly believing it. "A regular licensed private eye. I'm going to have an office and everything. Tony said so. He got me a license to operate. My name is going to be on the door. Boy, imagine it—me, a detective!"

Carol laughed at his wholesome glee. "Maybe it will only be for the duration of one case, Butch. Tony wants you to prowl Norwood and find out all you can about the men Bolton is supposed to have murdered. He figured if you were a licensed private detective, you'd get better results."

Butch scowled slightly. "I usually got results before. Maybe I didn't use a lot of fancy words or much brains, but when a guy didn't answer my questions, one biff and he always spoke up. I'm not giving up that method, badge or no badge. Think we'll have any trouble on this case, Carol?"

"I don't believe so, Butch. It seems simple, though Tony isn't satisfied with what he knows about it. Now these are orders. Tony and Silk will arrive in Norwood tonight. They have a suite of rooms reserved at the only good hotel in town. We are to check in there, also."

Butch nodded. "Me, I'll flash this buzzer and they'll hand me the bridal suite. No kidding, even a badge that says 'Chicken Inspector' makes people hop. If they don't read what it says. They can read this one I got, and they'll jump higher."

"Let's be serious now, Butch," Carol said. "On the outskirts of town I'll drop you off. You take a bus into town, check in at the hotel. I'll already be there. Then you are to go out and find all you can about a man named Leon Atkinson. Bolton is charged with strangling him. Tony wants to know if Atkinson had any other enemies."

Butch sobered immediately. "I'll try

to have as much dope as possible by the time Tony arrives."

ALMOST two hours later Butch was in his room at the hotel. He cleaned up, smoked a couple of cigarettes and did some thinking. He had already discovered, through old newspapers and from a bellhop who talked a lot for two dollars, that Leon Atkinson had made a high-class café his hangout. To Butch, no matter how deep the plush or fancy the glitter, those places were always saloons, and excellent spots in which to collect information.

He saw Carol demurely seated in the lobby, but neither paid the slightest heed to the other. Butch went on out and had something to eat. It was around cocktail time when he sauntered into the Flamingo, a café which had been named after the paintings of the pink birds adorning every wall. It was a quiet, respectable place. Even the smell of beer and liquor was faint.

Men and women, apparently the elite of Norwood, sat around cocktail tables and nibbled on canapés. There were a half dozen men at the bar, all clustered at one end. Butch knew the type—cronies who wanted a quick one after work, and usually stretched the quickie into something a trifle longer.

Butch ordered beer and, as he paid for it, opened his closed hand and showed the badge nestling in its leather case. The barkeep's eyebrows danced upward.

"I'm paid by the day to find out things," Butch said. "Now I also have a swindle sheet that can be padded a little. Especially for people who give me information that saves wear and tear on my shoe leather. Do you know what I mean, chum?"

The barkeep gently swabbed the bar. "I think so. Just don't want to get into any trouble. Whose wife hired you?"

Butch laughed. "Nothing like that. I want to know about Leon Atkinson, and he won't make any trouble for you on account of he's dead."

"Atkinson used to come here, stran-

ger, and that's a fact. But I didn't know him well."

"I don't care if you never even served him," Butch said. "What I'm interested in is the talk that went on about him after he was dead. People usually talk then. How about it?"

The barkeep rubbed his chin. "We-ll, I ain't turning down a chance to make a little dough. What do you want to know about what was said?"

"Who didn't like him, mostly."

The barkeep's eyes narrowed. "Mister, who you working for? J.B.?"

Butch looked his innocence perfectly because the initials meant nothing to him.

"I can't say who my client is," he said. "Ethics. You know, like a doctor has. But I can pay off."

The barkeep leaned closer. "If you're asking who Atkinson's enemies were it's because you want to try and pin his murder on somebody besides J.B. Listen, flatfoot, J.B. knocked him off and he killed Ventres too. He's going to burn for it, and no tinhorn sport with a tin badge is coming into this town and trying to prove J.B. didn't kill anyone."

The badge and private detective's license were amazingly steadying influences on Butch. Usually after a verbal tirade like this, he would merely have reached across the bar, dragged the bartender to the front side, and promptly changed the outlines of his face.

"You know," he said now, instead, "if I had any idea who you're talking about, I might be able to answer. Such as, who the heck is J.B.?"

"Jonathan Bolton—and don't give me that stuff. We figured he'd spend some of his dough to worm out of this mess. But all his money won't save him now. Not if he spends every dime he owns. So if you want to keep your head intact, stop asking fool questions. Now I've got to get back to work."

Butch decided he wasn't doing so well. He finished his beer, wondered which way to turn next, then became attentive when the bartender returned. He

had a huge schooner of beer in his hand and he set it on the bar before Butch.

"This tanker holds a quart and looks more your size," he said amiably enough. "I'm sorry I flew off the handle, pal. I guess you didn't know what you were stepping into when you took a fee from J.B. Tell you what, in a little while a friend of mine will show. A guy who knew all about Atkinson. Maybe he'll talk. That okay?"

"That's fine." Butch slid a ten-dollar bill under the soggy bar cloth. "That's swell."

HE WAITED twenty minutes, then a hard-faced man sidled up to him in the bar.

"You the dick?" he asked out of the corner of his mouth.

Butch reached for the badge, still proud to show it. The man shook his head.

"No. Talk soft, like we ain't talking at all. Can you pay fifty bucks for what you want to know?"

"If it's worth it," Butch answered.

"You can be the judge. Atkinson was after J.B.'s scalp. Had been for years, and he was just ready to twist the knife when J.B. bumped him. Atkinson had a lot of enemies. I can name a dozen . . . Oh, oh. Look, a guy just came in who can make a lot of trouble if he sees me talking to you. I'll meet you outside. My car is there. Saunter out in three or four minutes and I'll give you the high sign when I see you."

Butch nodded faintly, and went back to drinking his beer. Finally he walked slowly out of the place. Nobody eyed him suspiciously nor with animosity. He was just another stranger. Reaching the sidewalk, he spotted his informant, head stuck out of a car window, and beckoning.

Butch walked over to the car, the door opened. He saw two men in the back, and Butch instantly stiffened. He was too late. Another pair of men were standing directly behind him, and a gun was pressed against the small of his back!

CHAPTER III

"Get Out of Town!"

NOT A word was spoken. Butch got in the car and sat on the floor, knees hunched up around his chin. Two men sat in the back, two occupied the front seat where one drove and the other rode twisted around, and he held a gun down so that its muzzle snuggled against the back of Butch's ear.

Butch didn't know the streets, but they made no effort to conceal their route. It led through the busy section of town, out beyond the suburbs and finally into a strictly rural section. Butch didn't like it, but he knew better than to start a rumpus with a gun tickling his ear.

The car turned onto a dirt road, proceeded along this for a quarter of a mile and stopped. It was almost night. The shadows played strange tricks, and insect life was just starting to buzz and chirp. Butch and his captors seemed to be a long way from any place.

Under crisp orders Butch got out of the car, pushing himself backward. The men in the rear seat didn't move. The driver stayed behind the wheel and only the fourth man was outside the car with drawn gun. Butch figured it could be a ride. The gun would bark a couple of times and a quartette of killers would ride away without leaving much of a trace behind except for a bloody corpse.

Butch uncurled one leg, fumbled with the toe for the running board and got it set on the edge. Then he pulled himself out, started to straighten and let the precarious-toe-hold slip. He seemed to fall backward. The man with the gun thought it was an accident, and started to move aside. He passed within reach of one of Butch's flailing arms.

Butch latched a grip on the man's gun

hand, gave it one twist, and the gun dropped. Bone also cracked and the gunman let out a howl of anguish. Butch turned quickly, threw a left hook at the man's chin, sent him arching backward, then doubled him up with a right to the midsection that made a noise like slapping a hard-blown football. The man dropped.

The other three were out of the car now and lunging at the giant who had been their prisoner. One clambered onto Butch's back, wound an arm around his throat and took a handful of Butch's hair to hold onto. Another danced in front of him and swung a hard blow. It hit Butch on the chin, but he shook it off without the slightest effort.

The man on his back was troublesome. He was cutting off Butch's wind. Butch wound fingers around that man's arm, gave one savage wrench and the man howled and slid to the ground. His right arm was broken.

But the other pair had moved in fast and one held a blackjack while the other clubbed a heavy pistol. Both weapons crashed simultaneously against Butch's skull. The attack came swiftly, and Butch's senses went galloping in a dozen directions.

He started throwing wild punches. One of them connected, but he took another pair of raps on the skull. This time he went down on his knees, fighting gamely to retain consciousness. Rather dimly he saw one man picking up a large round rock. This came down on his head and Butch gave a long sigh as he slipped into unconsciousness. . . .

When he opened his eyes, he smelled whisky. He tasted it, peered through a film of it, and realized someone had poured the contents of a bottle over his head and chest. He tried to sit up. Someone cracked him on the jaw with a gun-butt and he fell back again.

It was dark now. Butch could see stars shining down at him. Real ones, not the kind he had been seeing after those vicious blows. He was kicked in the ribs, and then someone knelt beside him. The

voice was that of the man he had met at the bar.

"Listen to me, dick. We know you're not out cold. We could rub you out easy, but this time we won't. Take your tin badge and your big gun and drag out of Norwood. Stay away from our city, understand? If you're seen on the streets again, you'll get another ride. The last ride you'll ever go on. Got that?"

Butch said nothing. The man straightened up. He seemed to speak from a great distance.

"Boys, this big baboon may not remember what I told him. So let's fix it so every time he looks in a mirror he'll remember. Got to work on his face."

FORTUNATELY Butch was too far gone to feel much pain. There were dozens of blows and an assortment of kicks. He tasted blood mixed with the whisky now. Finally he succeeded in rolling over and raising one arm to protect his face. They let him alone then. Faintly he heard them laugh and walk toward the car, heard the motor start, and tires kick up dust. Then there was a long, long interval of silence. . . .

Someone was holding up his head. A soft hand smoothed back his hair, and a cold wet cloth was wiping off some of the blood. Butch suddenly let out a wild yell and grabbed for the person who was ministering to him.

"Butch, it's Carol! Be quiet. Those savages may return. Butch, how do you feel? I'll have you at a doctor's as soon as possible. Oh, those beasts!"

Butch managed to sit up. "They weren't gents," he admitted, and his voice sounded strained. He discovered that his lips were so swollen his words were muffled. "Boy, they certainly could dish it out. But two of 'em got busted wings. I'll know them by the splints they wear."

"Be quiet, Butch," Carol said. "I'll tell you what I saw happen while you rest. Two men entered the hotel lobby and I saw the clerk hand them the key to your room. They went upstairs and came



McGRATH

down again with your suitcases. I knew something was wrong, so I followed them. They drove here and met the others."

"What happened to my bags?" Butch mumbled.

"They're over beside the road. I saw them take you out of the car, saw you hit one of them, and I thought you might actually beat all four. But the pair I'd followed came up and joined in."

"There were six?" Butch felt a little better. "I thought some of those guys grew a couple of extra arms. I couldn't see so good."

"I wanted to start shooting," Carol went on. "I would have, too, if they had intended to kill you, but I heard them agree only to beat you up. Butch, I had to let them do it. If I'd butted in, our whole game would have been queered."

"Yeah—it's better the way you worked it. Being gone over ain't so bad, Carol. Not as long as they leave enough of you to go hunting the mugs who did it. I can get up now. Take me back, huh?"

"Yes, of course. I knew you wouldn't leave. But they'll be looking for you, Butch. So I suggest we slip into the hotel by the back door and go to my

room. You can stay there until you feel better, and I'll check in at another hotel. They'll think I still occupy the room and won't go hunting you there."

"That's a good idea," Butch agreed. "Say, what was behind dousing me with booze?"

"I heard them say if you made any more trouble, they'd claim you were wrecked by a hit-and-run driver while you were drunk. They could have made it stick, too."

"Who were they?" Butch asked. "Any names mentioned?"

"No. I think they're a garden variety of small-town crooks. Butch, it begins to look as if Tony is right."

"About maybe J.B. didn't knock off them two?"

"Yes. The moment you started asking questions, they asumed J.B. had hired you, and a private detective could be dangerous. So you were given the treatment that usually discourages any man. They don't want this case investigated, Butch."

Butch picked up his two suitcases and trudged beside Carol to the spot where her car was hidden.

"What they don't want and what they're going to get are not much the same, Carol," he said grimly. "You couldn't drag me out of Norwood now with a team of horses. Not before I meet certain gents and make them look like I do right now."

CHAPTER IV

Detective With a Grudge



ANTHONY QUINN, on Silk's arm, entered Police Headquarters in Norwood and found himself greeted somewhat glumly. It was clear that the police resented a strange prosecuting attorney.

The Chief of Police was a bulky man in civilian clothes, and wearing a big som-

brero which was meant for only one thing—to make certain he was recognized and remembered. His chief aide and head of the Detective Bureau was Lieutenant Johnson, a thin, dyspeptic-looking man.

"Glad to have you here, Mr. Quinn," Chief McKenzie said. "The Governor—if he had to send someone—couldn't have selected a better man. Don't you agree, Lieutenant?"

Johnson nodded his head slowly. "Yes, but a first year law student could put J.B. in the chair. That's where he's got to go, Mr. Quinn. Understand that, and you'll have no trouble with this case."

Quinn's lips tightened slightly. "I'm afraid, Lieutenant, that you have district attorneys classed in a completely wrong manner. Our job is to punish people who are guilty and make very, very certain those we punish really are guilty. I'm not familiar enough with this case to be able to judge properly."

"It's cut and dried," Chief McKenzie snorted. "Tell him, Lieutenant."

Lieutenant Johnson waited until Silk had helped Quinn into a chair.

"J.B. hasn't a prayer," he said then. "First of all, we have his chief secretary who will prove that Leon Atkinson forced his way into J.B.'s office. We'll prove that Atkinson had outwitted J.B. and gained control of the holdings which are J.B.'s principal source of income."

"This control—did it have to do with stock, perhaps?" Quinn broke in.

"Yes. Atkinson worked slowly and quietly, buying up stock until he had almost enough. Then he paid off a man whom J.B. thought would never sell, but who did."

now?"

Johnson gave a contemptuous shrug. "J.B., of course. Who else? First thing he did was check up to find that the deal hadn't quite gone through, and that with Atkinson's death it never would. He then browbeat this stockholder until the stock was sold to J.B. Now nobody can ever get control away from him."

"I see. Who controls those interests

"An excellent motive for murder," Quinn agreed. "Tell me about the actual crime."

"Atkinson came to J.B.'s office to gloat. There was a fight. J.B.'s secretary heard it and looked in. Atkinson was on the floor, his face all bloody, and J.B. was standing over him with murder in his eyes. J.B. claims Atkinson left right after that, and says he found him strangled in the adjoining office about fifteen minutes later. He neglected to report finding the corpse until after he had killed Henry Ventres."

"And the Ventres affair?"

"J.B. freely admits shooting him. Says on his way home there were two attempts on his life. Someone tried to wreck his car, then fired half a dozen bullets at it. We found no bullet-holes in the car, so that's an obvious lie. He swore somebody threw a knife at him in the garage. We couldn't find any knife. All this, J.B. says, made him afraid, so he put a gun in his pocket."

Quinn pursed his lips and whistled softly. "Half a dozen shots fired at his car and no bullet-holes? Even a complete amateur with a gun couldn't have missed an automobile. No knife in the garage. No trace of one, eh?"

"We found an incision in the wood where J.B. claims the knife stuck. He could have done that with his own knife, easy as not."

"I see. Go on, Lieutenant."

"J.B.'s story is that he heard a noise, stepped into the hallway and saw this man running toward the French windows at the rear. He couldn't see who it was, and the man refused to stop. In fact he acted as if he was going to pull a gun, so J.B. shot him. In the back, Mr. Quinn. Smack in the back. Then he pulled a great boner."

"I'm interested," Quinn urged him on.

"J.B. called his butler, told him to pack a bag with stuff he would need in jail, then to phone his attorney and have him be at Headquarters when J.B. was brought in. After this was done, the servant was to call the cops. Would an

innocent man do things that way?"

"You made the arrest, Lieutenant?"

"I did. Nothing ever gave me more pleasure. When I closed cuffs around that no-good's wrists, my life was complete. You'll probably hear this, so I'll tell you why I hate J.B. Six years ago my kid brother worked for him. The kid became a little careless with some of J.B.'s cash, and J.B. had him arrested. That's bad enough, but he insisted that I make the pinch. My brother went to prison. He was killed there, in a convict fight. I'm already trying to negotiate a pass to J.B.'s execution. Do you blame me?"

QUINN refused to be drawn into any comment. He merely said:

"From the facts it's quite clear that we have an excellent case. What was the motive in the killing of Ventres?"

"Ventres was in a jam." Chief McKenzie replied to that one. "J.B. had something on him . . . Lieutenant, you tell it."

Quinn was beginning to wonder who really ran this Police Department. McKenzie seemed content to be back-grounded by this sullen detective lieutenant.

Johnson rocked slowly back and forth in his swivel chair.

"Ventres worked for J.B." he finally said, "only he forgot to inform J.B. that he'd served time in another state for forgery. Nobody fools J.B. for long. When he found out, he got all the details and told Ventres to pick up stakes and move out of town. Otherwise he would have his whole record printed in the newspaper. Which J.B. also owns."

"And Ventres went to J.B. to plead with him?" Quinn inquired.

"Who knows? J.B. had Ventres' record. Maybe he was after that, though copies could have been obtained easily enough. I think Ventres had something on J.B., and got a bullet in the back because of what he knew."

Quinn slowly filled his pipe, moving his hands somewhat awkwardly, just as a

blind man will do. He got the pipe fired. Lieutenant Johnson jumped up and flicked a lighter into life. He held the flame above the pipe, but Quinn didn't puff. He kept on fumbling in his pockets for matches.

"The Lieutenant is holding a lighter, sir," Silk said.

Quinn began puffing. "Oh-oh, thanks. I'm sorry I didn't know."

"That's okay," Johnson said. "My fault. I forgot you were blind. Now is there anything else we can do to help?"

"Yes. I want a private room, unwired. I want J.B. brought in there. I intend to talk to him—alone. That is necessary, because I believe he senses the prevailing hatred everyone has for him. Perhaps I can get him to trust me enough so he'll talk."

"Say, that's a good idea," Chief McKenzie enthused. "Or is it, Lieutenant?"

"It might work. Remember, you're blind, Mr. Quinn, and J.B. is a killer. He won't be able to escape, but he could do some damage to you before we could reach him. I don't like the idea of you being alone with him."

"Nonsense," Quinn chided. "Silk will be right outside the door. Let me talk to him, and when the interview is over I'll tell you exactly how I felt about this."

Johnson scowled, but got up and left the office. In a few moments he returned and led Quinn down a dismal corridor to a small room without windows. All furniture except two chairs had been removed.

"We had J.B. brought down from the County Jail only this afternoon," Johnson said. "Couldn't keep him here all this time, but as his trial begins tomorrow, we brought him back."

Johnson left to fetch the prisoner. Silk stood close to Quinn. He spoke in a barely audible voice.

"Ask me, sir, and that detective lieutenant wouldn't hesitate to murder anyone he didn't like."

"I sized him up about the same, Silk," Quinn murmured. "I also think he runs this Department, and that McKenzie is

just a stooge. About J.B.—well, it certainly looks as if we have a case . . . How was Butch? Did he take a very bad beating?"

"An ordinary man might have died from it," Silk growled. "I can't figure that out."

"It's simple. Someone doesn't want a private detective asking questions about anything which could help J.B."

"Then J.B. was framed, sir?"

"I didn't say that. Keep in mind the fact that J.B. is an utterly detested man, and that there are few who wouldn't like to see him go to the chair. They would resent anyone working in his favor. They're going to resent the Black Bat."

"You're going into it then?" Silk asked hopefully. "From J.B.'s angle?"

"I intend to satisfy myself beyond any doubt that J.B. is guilty . . . Quiet now. They're coming."

Silk heard nothing, but he knew better than to dispute Quinn's warnings. Quinn could hear things much sooner than Silk. Quinn's expression didn't alter, his eyes didn't move from their staring ahead. But he saw J.B. as the man was brought in, wrists cuffed. Lieutenant Johnson shoved the prisoner into the other chair. He did it brutally, with apparent glee.

J. B. HAD not changed much. He was freshly shaven, well-dressed. He looked as important as he ever had except for one thing. It lay in his eyes. They were duller, and behind them, Quinn knew, was a brain gradually giving way to the hopelessness of his position.

Silk closed the door and Quinn was alone with Jonathan Bolton. Quinn crossed his legs and puffed on his pipe.

"My name is Tony Quinn," he said. "I'm a New York District Attorney especially assigned to prosecute you, Mr. Bolton."

"I guessed that," Bolton said quietly. "What's the matter with . . . Are you blind?"

"Yes. I'm blind."

Bolton threw his head back and laughed. "So this is the final act of retribution. To have me convicted by a blind man. Who thought of this scheme, Mr. Quinn? No, don't tell me. It was this whole town. It will give them something to chuckle about. J.B. finally gone down to defeat at the hands of a blind man."

"The presiding judge is also a stranger here. He isn't blind, Mr. Bolton." Quinn displayed no rancor in his manner. "You may not believe this, but I'd like to help you, if I can."

"You—help me? To what end? A leather cushion on the electric chair, perhaps?"

Quinn smiled a little. "You've become very bitter, Mr. Bolton. Not that I blame you."

"Bitter? How else would I be? I'm a doomed man. Doomed to an ignoble death for something I did not do. I killed no one. Oh, I admit my bullet was responsible for Ventres' death, but he was an intruder in my home, a prowler, a burglar. The fool should have stopped and given up when I warned him. I didn't know who he was. It was dark. I'd been the subject of two distinct attacks, and I was afraid. So I fired. Perhaps I was hasty. But I didn't kill Atkinson, and I haven't the faintest idea who did."

"What was Ventres doing in your home?" Quinn asked.

"How do I know? I suppose he was after some evidence I had against him."

"He had nothing on you?"

"That upstart? Look here, Quinn, you don't know this town very well. My great-great grandfather founded it, and the citizens fought him. They fought my grandfather, my father, and they've resented and battled me. It's come to be an accepted sport in Norwood. There's nothing personal in it—not with most of the citizens. They merely resent the fact that I'm rich and powerful, that I control everything worth controlling."

"I'm not interested in that," Quinn said. "What people think of you is beside the point, though if it shows up when I'm selecting a jury, I'll impanel jurors from out of town. Whatever you think of me, Mr. Bolton, you are going to get a fair trial."

Bolton, believing he was alone with a man who could not see, suddenly let himself go. He covered his eyes with one hand, heaved a great, silent sigh. He was almost whipped. That pride, bred in him from generations of wealthy and powerful men, had almost gone down under the assault of public opinion, jail bars, steel doors, guards and policemen.

"Mr. Bolton," Quinn said, "I have one question to ask. It is important, though you may not believe it. But first of all I want your promise to keep quiet about the nature of our interview. So far as anyone else is concerned, I asked you routine questions. It that perfectly clear?"

Bolton raised his head. His eyes were haggard. "I give you my word. It's

[Turn page]

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strange, but I trust you. You, the man who is being paid to send me to the chair. What is your question?"

"Is there anyone in town—probably a gangster of some sort—who would resent any person who might be trying to help you?"

"Yes." Bolton's voice had a puzzled note. "Yes, there is. A man named Luke Markey. Our local version of Al Capone. The police couldn't put him out of business, the civic committees failed miserably, but I beat him. I purchased every piece of property which he used for gambling purposes. That's his main source of income—gambling. I drove him out, and I saw to it he never got going again. Not within the city limits. Though he has a place out in the hills somewhere."

"Thank you," Quinn said. "One more thing. Have you no relatives? No one to—well, call upon?"

Bolton's lower jaw stuck out pugnaciously. "No," he said curtly.

Quinn arose, tapped his cane across the floor and found the door. He knocked. Silk unlocked it and called Lieutenant Johnson. Bolton was led away. When Lieutenant Johnson returned from the cell room, he encountered Quinn tapping his way along the corridor.

"Well, Mr. Quinn," Johnson said, "what do you think?"

Quinn shrugged. "I'd keep trying to get one of those passes to the execution chamber, if that's what you really want, Lieutenant."



Death Stalks the Oil Fields
in

THUNDER IN STONY FLATS

A Mystery Novelet

By A. J. COLLINS

NEXT ISSUE

Lady With a Secret



CAUTIOUSLY Silk drove the big limousine through the downtown streets. Quinn, beside him, seemed to be deep in thought. But when Silk reached the beginnings of a speedway out of town he stepped on it.

"Well, sir," he said, "what do you think?"

"J.B. is a tired old man," Quinn said. "He's ready to plead for mercy, except that his pride gets in the way. He didn't kill those two men, Silk. Not with malice aforethought. I don't believe he killed Atkinson at all."

"But the evidence is so strong," Silk objected.

"I know. I'll have to prosecute him. Unmercifully, too. At the same time I'll work to prove his innocence and that won't be easy, because there isn't a soul in town who would raise a finger to help me. He doesn't have a friend, Silk. I've never met a man so alone in my life . . . Find a dark side road and pull into it. I'm changing clothes."

"You're going to work as the Black Bat?" Silk asked.

"Yes. Thanks to the clever compartment you rigged in the back of the car we can carry enough equipment. I can't prow around the hotel in a black hood, so I'll have to make all my changes in the car."

Quinn dropped his blind act when the car stopped, climbed into the back seat and began switching clothes.

"This is going to be dangerous and difficult," he told Silk. "If the slightest breath of suspicion links Tony Quinn to the Black Bat, we'll have trouble. Therefore we act swiftly and waste no motions."

"Where do you intend to start, sir?" Quinn tied the laces of soft, crepe-

soled shoes. "No one has bothered to determine what Henry Ventres was doing in J.B.'s home that night. Also there were two attacks on J.B.'s life, both brushed off as impossible. In the first one several shots were fired at J.B. They missed him and his car. Which is practically impossible at close range, so if it really did happen, the gun was loaded with blanks."

"How can you be sure J.B. didn't make it all up?"

"He had no reason to, Silk. The second attack was made by a thrown knife. The mark where the knife hit was found but no blade of course. I believe someone tried to frighten J. B. to such an extent that he'd be jittery and apt to act without thinking. I believe that Ventres was sent to J.B.'s home to be killed by J.B. It wasn't a long shot for any many who knows psychology. A man afraid for his life, armed, and encountering an intruder wouldn't hesitate."

Quinn strapped on a shoulder sling, slid a heavy automatic into the clip, then drew on a black coat. Over his head went a jet-black hood. The Black Bat was ready for action. He climbed into the front seat and replaced the hood with a wide-brimmed black hat which would hide his features but draw far less attention than the hood.

"Take me to Seven-o-three Oak Terrace," he told Silk. "That is where Henry Ventres' widow lives. Maybe she knows something. Chances are she has never been asked about her husband's reasons for being in J.B.'s home. No one wanted to know why. The answer might throw some doubt on J.B.'s guilt."

Silk wagged his head in doubt. "So you're going to prosecute J.B. by day and work to free him by night. In a city completely hostile to any friend of J.B.'s. I hope it works, sir."

"It has to work, Silk. I've got to know whether or not J.B. is guilty. My mind is too filled with doubts. There are too many angles which have not been investigated, left that way be people who are satisfied with things as they are now

. . . Pass the house and go around the block while I size up things."

When the car finally slowed and pulled in toward the curb, a wisp of shadow seemed to detach itself and move silently into the dark yard around the Ventres home. Now the Black Bat's uncanny sight became beneficial. He could move fast and without making a sound, for the darkness meant nothing to his eyes.

When he reached the house he realized he might have an hysterical woman on his hands if he simply rang the bell and let her open the door to meet a hooded man dressed entirely in black. Therefore he checked the kitchen door of the modest frame bungalow, used a pick-lock and soon had the bolt back.

The Black Bat had made an elaborate study of locks. There were some that not even his highly skilled technique could conquer, but the average lock gave way silently under his tools and skill.

HE PASSED noiselessly through the kitchen and paused at the door to listen. Now it was his unusual hearing which helped him know Mrs. Ventres was alone in the house. A radio played softly, and he could detect the faint click of knitting needles.

He moved through the dining room, into the small hallway, and had a glimpse of a middle-aged woman busily engaged in knitting. She didn't see the black-gloved hand creep around the corner of the doorway, locate the light switch and plunge the room into darkness.

Mrs. Ventres gave a faint scream.

"Please don't be too alarmed, Mrs. Ventres," a calm voice said. "I'm a friend. If you will promise not to scream, I'll turn the lights back on."

"I-I promise," she said. "I-I'm not afraid."

"Good, Mrs Ventres. Let me warn you, I wear a hood, and I'm not exactly dressed like a guest. But I mean you absolutely no harm."

The lights flooded the room. Mrs Ventres blinked, and then gasped when she saw the weird figure in black. She had

jumped to her feet. But she sat down slowly, undecided whether or not to keep her promise not to scream. Yet there had been some reassuring quality in the voice of that sinister-looking figure.

"Thank you for not raising a commotion," the Black Bat said. "I am the Black Bat. Have you heard of me?"

"No—no, I haven't. Are you some sort of a—thief?"

"Not exactly. I'm a detective, in a way. I don't work with the police, but I do try to help people in trouble. I came to talk to you about your husband's death."

"Jonathan Bolton killed him," Mrs. Ventres said stiffly. "There is no mys-

he did so like a thief in the night."

"Mr. Bolton was going to expose my husband. He had served a prison term. He wanted some papers Mr. Bolton had. That's why he went there. If he had tried to enter through the front door, Bolton would have had him thrown out. That is the truth."

"I believe you. Is there any reason why Bolton should have hated your husband, to do this to him?"

"Yes. My husband once owned property Bolton wanted. Oh, he got it, but not without a stiff fight, and he hated Henry ever since. He swore some day he would get even—and he did. He did! He killed Henry."

TONY QUINN AT HIS BEST IN

THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS

NEXT ISSUE'S BLACK BAT NOVEL!

tery about it. Bolton admits he killed him."

"That's quite true." The Black Bat sat down. "But Bolton may have fired that shot in the honest—though mistaken—idea that your husband was an intruder. Why did your husband go to Mr. Bolton's home? Why did he enter without announcing himself? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know. He told me he was going there. You're a friend of Jonathan Bolton, aren't you? He hired you, didn't he?"

"Jonathan Bolton probably doesn't even know I exist," the Black Bat explained. "I'm working only in the interests of seeing justice done. Bolton may be the most avaricious, grasping man on the face of the earth, but if he did not kill your husband or that other man, then he does not deserve the punishment which will surely be inflicted upon him unless the truth is discovered."

"What do you want me to say?" Mrs. Ventres asked.

"Just answer those questions. Why your husband went to Bolton's. Why

"Who else knew your husband was going to Bolton's home?"

Mrs. Ventres didn't reply immediately. She seemed to be considering both her answer and the man in black who sat close by her. Finally she shook her head.

"I can't talk to you. I won't answer the questions of a man who won't let me see what he looks like. I'm sorry. If you do not leave at once, I shall phone the police."

"Suppose," the Black Bat said softly, "someone arranged all this, knowing your husband would have the status of a thief in Bolton's home, and quite possibly might get himself killed. What would you think then?"

"I don't believe it. No such thing happened. I refuse to talk any more. I'm—I'm upset. I hoped to forget, but now you bring it all back again. Please go."

The Black Bat arose. "Whatever you wish, Mrs. Ventres. However I'll be back. Perhaps, after you have time to think, you may want to talk to me. If I return at—say—one o'clock this morning, will you admit me?"

"Yes," she said. "Only go now. Let me think. Give me some peace. Time—quiet. "I-I can't think now."

CHAPTER VI

Target in the Night

AS SHE spoke, she covered her eyes with a handkerchief and broke into uncontrollable sobs. After a moment of this she peered through her fingers. The Black Bat was gone. She arose quickly, made a rapid tour of the house, then went to the telephone. She dialed with fingers that shook so badly they could hardly find the numbers.

Silk Kirby, meanwhile, picked up the Black Bat and drove away with him. The Black Bat was frowning when he stripped off the hood and donned the black hat instead.

"She didn't tell me much," he said, "but I have a feeling that I aroused either anger or surprise in her. While you're driving to the city, I'll change clothes. We'll get Carol to come out here immediately and keep an eye on things. Step on it, Silk."

BACK at the hotel it was blind Tony Quinn, with his white cane, who stepped out of the car and waited for Silk to take his arm. Carol was in the lobby and caught Silk's covert signal. After a suitable pause, she went to Quinn's suite.

There she explained that Butch was in her room and that she had checked into another hotel under a false name.

"I hang around here as much as possible so they'll think I'm still a guest," she explained. "That way Butch can get the rest he needs. And the security. They swore they'd kill him on sight if he came back to town."

"They may try," Quinn said. "I think I know who was responsible, too. A local hot-shot named Luke Markey. What his reasons were I can't say, but we'll try to find out. Right now I want you to go to the home of Mrs. Ventres. Silk will tell you how to get there. Park near the house and keep an eye on it. If Mrs. Ventres leaves, tail her. Find out who comes to see her."



WHILE Carol listened to Silk's detailed description of the premises, Quinn sat quietly in deep thought. In the morning he would have to go into court and begin the prosecution of Jonathan Bolton. The case shouldn't take very long. Bolton had

no witnesses, no defense to speak of.

The courtroom would be full of morbidly curious people hoping to see the man convicted, hoping to see that mantle of pride he wore, drop from him. They would be praying he would cringe and shout for mercy. Quinn knew people, and he was getting the idea that most of the inhabitants of this city were the victims of a sinister mass hysteria about Jonathan Bolton.

They saw in him only a domineering man, cold, haughty, and relentless. They saw him as the practical owner of the city, whose word made laws and unmade men. They had lost sight of the fact that Jonathan Bolton had kept this city going after his forefathers had built it up. They had forgotten that it was his initiative and hard work which provided a livelihood for most of the inhabitants, his money which was risked so that the whole city might benefit.

Now Bolton was to be tried for murder. Quinn knew he could convict the man with a minimum of effort, but he would rather have delayed things. There were too many unanswered questions. First of all, Bolton had never been a liar or a crook. The story of two attacks upon his life was certainly not something he had dreamed up. Bolton would have made an improvised story much cleverer.

So it seemed that someone had fired at Bolton's car and either purposely missed,

or had been shooting blank cartridges. Then a knife had been thrown at him. Probably that had been meant to miss also. The motive was simple. Alarm Bolton to such an extent that he would hardly stop to think if anything like a fresh attack was made.

Chief McKenzie, Lieutenant Johnson, and almost everyone in the city thought that Bolton's mistakes were against him, that when he neglected to report Atkinson's murder, it was because he had killed the man and was trying to arrange an alibi. They believed that when he had shot Ventres and then told the butler to pack a bag of things for use in jail, he had meant to confess.

Quinn thought of these actions with a directly opposite viewpoint. It was his idea that Bolton had wanted time to get advice, to think out Atkinson's murder. Then, when Ventres had been shot, he had realized what was to happen and had coolly arranged to make things as comfortable and safe for himself as possible. He had merely been thinking like a good executive, and a cold-blooded murderer would hardly have thought along those lines.

Quinn nodded at Carol and wished her luck as she departed. Then he told Silk to order dinner sent up. Meanwhile Quinn shaved and changed clothes. He was comfortably waiting for dinner when a knock came on his door. Silk opened the door wide to admit the waiter and his table, but instead a gray-haired, distinguished-looking man stood there, with a remarkably pretty girl at his side.

"My name is Dr. Peter Dunbar," he told Silk. "It is important for me to see Mr. Quinn."

As Dunbar entered at Silk's invitation, he took Quinn's hand and shook it warmly.

"I've heard of you and your fame as a prosecuting attorney," he said. "I have nothing but the greatest admiration for you, Mr. Quinn. Though I wish you were on my side instead of the State's."

"You're a friend of Mr. Bolton, then?" Quinn said.

"Perhaps the only one he has. I'm also his physician. I don't practice. My work is in the field of research and Mr. Bolton supplied me with a laboratory. Oh yes—this is Mrs. Ellen Waring with me. I know you are blind, so I will merely say that she is charming, pretty, and that I love her as if she were my daughter instead of—Jonathan Bolton's."

"Bolton has a daughter," Quinn looked amazed, and he was. "But I didn't even know he was married."

"His wife, Ellen's mother, died a long time ago. Three years ago Ellen married Dennis Waring, and her father promptly threw her out of the house. He did not approve—to put it mildly—of Dennis."

Ellen Waring leaned forward. "Please, Mr. Quinn, listen to us. I know my father isn't a murderer. He hates me and refuses to recognize my existence, but that doesn't matter. I know he is not capable of killing anyone."

"You came with some sort of proof?" Quinn asked.

"Proof?" Dr. Dunbar laughed. "There is no proof in his favor. It's all against him. I'll tell you why we came. To plead for him. To humble ourselves and beg the mercy he is too proud to ask for. Jonathan Bolton would go to the electric chair without asking a favor of anyone. He's that type, but we—we love him. We know he isn't guilty, and we want to help him."

QUINN pressed the tips of his fingers together and stared directly between the two people seated before him.

"Mrs. Waring," he said, "does your husband regard your father with as much animosity as your father has shown toward him, and you?"

"Dennis is hot-headed—" Dr. Dunbar suddenly snapped his jaws shut. After a moment he resumed. "Dennis naturally resents Jonathan's unwarranted attitude, because he knows how Ellen feels. There is no other reason."

"I see," Quinn said. "I'd like to help you, of course, but what can I do? Bring me some evidence which might serve to



SILK

create even vague doubt as to Bolton's guilt, and I'll go to work on it. Unless you do, I must begin my prosecution in the morning."

"But he didn't do it!" Ellen Waring exclaimed. "If you only knew him! Really knew him, as I do. You'd realize he won't help himself because of that stubborn pride. He thinks people are laughing and gloating."

"They are," Dr. Dunbar broke in mildly.

"Let them," Ellen said tartly. "Some day they'll realize Dad is a good man. Mr. Quinn, can't you postpone the case? Give us a little time?"

"No," Quinn said flatly.

Dr. Dunbar arose and took Ellen Waring's arm.

"Come, my dear. This man is no different than the police. He has a duty to perform, and nothing must come between him and his confounded duty. If you send Jonathan to his death, Mr. Quinn, I hope you sleep well the night they throw the switch."

Ellen Waring was weeping as Silk let

them out. Quinn hadn't moved. His apparently blind eyes still stared at the blank wall.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Silk gasped.

"They didn't come here to plead for J.B. Not for that reason only, at any rate. Did you catch the reaction when I hinted that Dennis Waring might have a motive for framing Bolton? That is what they came to find out, Silk. They wanted to know if we were considering anything of that nature. . . . Silk, go out and rent an inconspicuous car, drive it to a remote place and replace the marker plates with the set of untraceable ones we brought along. The Black Bat can't be driving about in Tony Quinn's car. Then come back here as quickly as possible."

While Silk was gone, Quinn phoned Chief McKenzie and asked him about Bolton's daughter and son-in-law. McKenzie couldn't say much. He wasn't sure. But if Mr. Quinn called Lieutenant Johnson he'd get the low-down. Quinn did call Johnson, wondering about Mc-

Kenzie and his strange kowtowing to his Detective Bureau chief.

"Ellen?" Johnson laughed. "Sure I know her. Why didn't I tell you Bolton had a daughter? Now what difference does it make? If you'd asked J.B. himself, he'd have told you he had neither kith nor kin. When he threw Ellen out on her pretty ear, he meant it."

"What about Dennis Waring, her husband?" Quinn asked.

"He runs a small factory—mill type—and in his own small way is in direct opposition to J.B. Dennis hates him like poison. He wants none of J.B.'s dough, but figures Ellen got a dirty deal. It's just another of those things which endear J.B. in the public's eyes."

"What of this Dr. Dunbar?" Quinn asked.

"Well, Dunbar used to be practitioner here, but went away to specialize. When he came back, J.B. subsidized him. Gave him a lab, though Dunbar is supposed to have lots of money. That's all I know. Dunbar always was a swell man. He's good—down to earth. Everyone likes him."

"I can see why they would," Quinn said. "Thanks, Lieutenant. I was merely wondering, after they left here. Seemed odd to me that they should have looked me up."

"Nothing odd about it, Quinn. Ellen is just worried about the father who refuses to recognize her as his daughter. . . Look, you'd better get some sleep. You'll have to be on your toes in the morning."

"Don't worry about me," Quinn chuckled. "See you then. . . ."

It was almost one in the morning when the Black Bat pulled up in the modest sedan which Silk had rented. The Black Bat was directly behind Mrs. Ventres' home. He looked for signs of Carol, but couldn't spot her.

He crossed a yard, reached the Ventres' back door, and let himself in just as before. The house was dark and still. Almost too still. He had a premonition of trouble.

MRS. VENTRES didn't seem to be on the first floor. The Black Bat started for the stairway. In the living room doorway stood a solid-backed chair and on it rested an alarm clock with a luminous dial. It seemed an odd place for an alarm clock to be, but the Black Bat had no time to investigate this now.

He went up the steps quickly and began searching the rooms. The house was in complete darkness, but he moved about as if it were flooded with light. When he opened the door to Mrs. Ventres' bedroom, his eyes penetrated the dark and showed him the woman he had come to see—too late.

Mrs. Ventres was propped up in bed against two pillows. Except that her face was ghastly gray and her head lolled against her chest, she might have been asleep. Across the blankets covering her lap, lay a framed portrait of her husband. Her left hand still clutched the edge of the frame.

The Black Bat quietly drew his gun, left the room, and searched the rest of the house. He found nothing. Then he went back to the dead woman. He estimated death had come not more than an hour before. On the night table beside the bed stood an unlabeled two-ounce bottle. The cap was off and some of the brown fluid it contained had been poured into a wine glass.

The Black Bat bent down and sniffed of the glass. The odor was sweet, permeating, and he thought he knew the identity of the poison. He smelled of the open bottle and got the same odor.

Suddenly a wave of fury shot through him. This was no suicide, though all the evidence was here. They would say Mrs. Ventres had taken her own life out of sorrow for her dead husband. She had poured the poison and imbibed it while looking at her husband's portrait. The set-up was perfect, but not to the Black Bat.

Mrs. Ventres had talked to someone, had asked what she should do in the face of the Black Bat's visit. She had been told—with poison. Further, the pres-

CHAPTER VII

The Suspects Gather

ence of the Black Bat in town was now known to at least one citizen of Norwood. The word would spread. From here on every move the Black Bat made would have to be cautious.

He found Mrs. Ventres' purse. It contained nothing of interest.

He went down the stairs slowly and again noticed the alarm clock placed on a chair in the middle of the living room doorway. The Black Bat came to a quick stop. He smiled slowly behind his hood, put his back against the wall, and continued down the steps carefully, slowly.

At the bottom he took a quick look across the dining room. From the east window that alarm clock with its luminous dial could easily be seen. And anyone leaving this house by the front or rear door would have to pass in front of that dial.

A marksman waiting at the dining room window didn't need light to find a target. When the luminous figures on the clock's face were blotted out, someone was in position. The Black Bat dropped flat and wriggled along the floor beneath the clock. He reached an umbrella stand, quietly opened an umbrella and held it ready. He gripped his gun with the other fist and aimed at the dining room window.

Then he slowly thrust out the open umbrella until it obscured the luminous figures. Instantly glass crashed and four fast shots rang out. The Black Bat felt the umbrella twitch in his hand. His own automatic threw flame and destruction at the window. There were no more shots.

He opened the front door, raced down the porch and leaped the rail. High-heeled shoes were clicking on concrete. That probably meant that Carol was hurrying up. Porch lights of neighboring home went on, bedroom windows were raised.

In the distance the Black Bat heard a siren's wail. That meant a radio car, and this was no place for a hooded man to be caught!



IN VAIN the Black Bat looked for the person who had set that neat trap. There was no time to conduct a thorough hunt, though he did examine the ground beneath the dining room window. There were no footprints. There was no blood.

He heard Carol come closer, and hissed a signal. She joined him in a moment and they raced off into the night toward the car which the Black Bat had parked on the next street. They were well away from the vicinity before the horde of police arrived.

The Black Bat stripped off his hood and tucked it under his coat. He drew on the black hat and relaxed.

"What happened, Tony?" Carol asked. "I heard all that shooting."

"I did part of it, a would-be assassin did the rest, and both of us need target practice. Tell me what you saw around here tonight, Carol."

"Very little. When I arrived, the house was in darkness. I waited, and at ten minutes of eleven Mrs. Ventres drove into the garage, locked it, and entered the house. She made some coffee, paced the floor, put out a milk bottle, and went upstairs to bed. I could see her hanging up some stockings. There's a small line out of the bathroom window. Then the lights went out, and I presumed she had retired."

"Nobody came to see her, Carol?"

"Not that I saw. Of course I could only watch two sides of the house. She could have had a visitor through the kitchen door."

"No one came," Tony Quinn said musingly. "Mrs. Ventres did not go out again. So she must have obtained the poison earlier in the evening. That is, if she did obtain it, and a murderer did

not bring it there. And you saw her washing out her nylons. An odd thing for a woman to do when she contemplates suicide within the hour. Would you wash your nylons if you intended killing yourself before they were even dry?"

"She's dead then?" Carol asked. "Mrs. Ventres is dead, Tony?"

"Poisoned. It looks like suicide, and it will be officially listed as suicide, but I know she was murdered because she was going to tell me something. I had an appointment with her at one o'clock. Yet she retired and took this poison. I don't believe it. If we could only determine where she went after I left her and before you got here, Carol. Tomorrow, see if you can pick up any trail she left."

"I'll do my best," Carol promised.

The Black Bat dropped her close by the hotel to which she had transferred, drove the rented car with its untraceable marker plates to a side street, and parked it there. Making certain he was not under observation, the Black Bat darted for the side entrance to the hotel.

He had already scouted every exit and entrance. Late at night he could use the elevator assigned to the kitchen help for room service. He rode this to a floor well above his own and walked down the stairs. He tapped on the door and Silk let him in.

Silk's forehead was knotted in furrows of worry. He wiped sweat off his face and sat down weakly.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" the Black Bat asked.

"Nothing your return hasn't cured," Silk muttered. "Did you know the police are looking for you?"

"As Quinn, or as the Black Bat?"

"The Black Bat. Somebody saw you sneaking away from the Ventres house after there was a lot of shooting. You were described in detail and the cops named you over the radio. Mrs. Ventres killed herself, and they think you may have made her do that. At any rate they don't like you, and orders have been issued for all cops to shoot you on sight."

"Hmm." The Black Bat was rapidly

becoming Tony Quinn again. "That's going to make the game interesting. . . How about a little coffee, Silk?"

"I'm putting a stick in mine," Silk vowed. "I need it after sweating out the last forty minutes. I thought I'd be an old, old man by the time you got here. . . ."

IN THE morning, Silk had to get a police escort in order to pilot the car through the crowd assembled outside the courthouse. It looked as if a holiday had been declared. An enterprising street merchant was even selling balloons to mothers with small children in tow.

"Look at them," Silk grumbled. "All screaming for Bolton's blood."

"Yes," Quinn said tightly. "There is much more than mere curiosity here. These people really hate J.B. And, Silk, it could be that someone is cashing in on his unpopularity, making this community hatred for him an asset to murder."

"Well, if Bolton is being framed," Silk offered, "you'd have a sweet time trying to find someone in that crowd who wouldn't want to try it."

Lieutenant Johnson was on the job when Silk stopped the car. At Johnson's commands, two lines of police formed to hold back the crowd. Silk helped Quinn out of the car. He was cheered like a pinch hitter going in to save the game at the last inning.

There was an office assigned to Quinn adjoining the courtroom and Johnson led him and Silk there, closed the door and sank into a chair.

"V-J day wasn't much worse," he said, and grinned. "Boy, how a man could clean up selling tickets to J.B.'s execution!"

Quinn didn't comment.

"Lieutenant," he said, instead, "I hear something developed last night. The widow of one of J.B.'s victims is dead."

Johnson shoved his hat to the back of his head and reached for a cigarette.

"Uh-huh. Nothing there, though. Just a plain suicide. Half expected it myself.

She was crazy about Henry, and simply couldn't take it any longer."

"You're quite positive it was suicide?" Quinn asked sharply.

Johnson gave him an uncompromising look. "What difference does it make, Quinn? Oh, I suppose you big city D.A.'s are always looking for stuff like this. Well, I handled the investigation personally. Her prints alone were on the bottle of poison, the glass she drank it from, and the picture of her husband

"The Black Bat," Quinn said softly. "Lieutenant, are you positive about this? Did anyone actually see the Black Bat?"

"Of course. Whoever it was phoned Headquarters and gave a perfect description of him. As well as you can describe a man who wears a black hood."

"Who phoned in this information?"

"He didn't give his name. Too excited, I guess. But we can handle the Black Bat. On our books he's a criminal, and gets treated like one. I've told the



CAROL

which she held in her hand as she must have swallowed the stuff. The house was locked up tight except for a busted window, but that happened after Mrs. Ventres was dead."

"How do you know?"

"Look Quinn, you're taking this as too big a thing. A neighbor heard the window break and noted the time. Besides, a second after the window was smashed, somebody fired half a dozen shots. We know who that was, only we can't figure out who the Black Bat was shooting at. From the looks of things he just blazed away at an empty room."

boys to plug him on sight. You know, I think the Black Bat has a drag with somebody in the city. That's how he gets away with it. But not here. Maybe you can prosecute him, too. That would be a good one, eh, Quinn?"

"It might prove interesting," Quinn said. "But the presence of the Black Bat lends a different color to this case. Whether you like him or not, whether you approve of his methods or not, he does try to help the underdog, and here we have only one man in that position. Jonathan Bolton."

Johnson nodded eagerly. "Say, you

could be right, and I'll bet I know the angle. I got word a private eye was in town, working for Bolton. Now this private eye might have been sent by the Black Bat. Bolton is one of the richest men in the country. His kind of dough could hire the Black Bat. That's it!"

Quinn was treading on thin ice and knew it. He was more than glad when a bailiff announced that court would convene in ten minutes. Quinn let Silk adjust his tie, brush imaginary specks off his collar and then lead him into the solidly packed courtroom.

Quinn's apparently sightless eyes saw Ellen Bolton Waring in one of the front seats. On one side of her sat Dr. Dunbar, saddened, morose-looking. On the other side was a red-headed young man with an angry expression on his face. Quinn thought he was looking at Dennis Waring.

THEN he saw another group which attracted his attention. Two men, both with their right arms in slings, sat on either side of a thick-eyebrowed, squat, florid-looking man of about fifty. He sat with his shoulders hunched up, and a scowl on his fat face.

Lieutenant Johnson was at Quinn's side too. Quinn spoke to him.

"From the sounds I hear, I imagine this courtroom is jammed, eh, Lieutenant?"

"That's a mild word for it. Boy, if John Strange ever saw this, he'd build us a new courthouse."

"What did you say?" Quinn asked. "John Strange?"

"Oh, didn't you know about him? I'll tell you. . . Wait a second. Here's your chair. There are still a few minutes before the judge will come in. John Strange. I thought everybody knew of him. He's the guy who erected a whole new hospital. He rebuilt the library, and added a museum. He supports the Public Nursing system so it's about the best there is. Each Christmas he sends a big check to the hospital which pays for all charity cases they handled. He donates

ten grand to an outfit known as Santa Claus Incorporated—a bunch of guys who go around giving poor kids presents each year."

"Is that all?" Quinn smiled. "This John Strange must be as wealthy as J.B."

"Yeah, I guess so. Only he ain't J.B. Somebody got the idea he might be doing it, but like I expected, J.B. had nothing to do with it."

"You thought John Strange might be J.B. But Lieutenant, don't you know who John Strange is?"

"Nope. He's the biggest mystery in Norwood. I. . . Excuse me, Mr. Quinn. They just brought J.B. in, and his daughter is signaling me like mad. Be right back."

Silk moved closer to Quinn. "That's an odd story about this mysterious John Strange, sir."

"Odd, and interesting. I've never heard anything like it. Take a look at the jury panel. Silk, the courts were wrong this time. J.B. rated a change of venue. Every man and woman on that panel is dying to get on the jury box and judge him."

"They've already got him judged," Silk commented. "Look, we need time. You can stall in selecting the jury. String it out, sir."

"No, I can't do that, Silk. It's quite impossible. At this moment we're walking the most dangerous ground of our career. The slightest upheaval and I'll be marked as the Black Bat, and that means—trouble. As a D.A., I'll naturally like a jury such as the one I'll choose. It's up to the defense to stall and—they won't. Bolton's a smart man, but he needs new lawyers. Those birds haven't been in a criminal court since their college days back about sixty years ago."

Silk had no chance to carry on the conversation. Lieutenant Johnson was back, holding a folded note in his hand. He handed it to Silk.

"This is from Ellen Waring, the old boy's daughter. She asked me to beg you, Mr. Quinn, to hand it to her father. She

has an idea he might take it from you."

"No," Quinn said tartly. "I won't do that. My only connection with Mr. Bolton is to put him in the electric chair where he belongs. I'm not an errand boy to a murderer. You hand him the note if you like, Lieutenant."

Johnson gave a low whistle. "Say, you really mean business, don't you? For a while I thought you were going soft on us. Okay, I'll hand him the note."

CHAPTER VIII

Quinn in Action



JOHNSON went over to where Bolton sat, head high, eyes shining, chin stuck out. J.B. was himself, and not bowing to any man. He exhibited no trace of fear. There was even a hint of contempt in the half-smile that occasionally played

around his mouth.

Johnson handed him the note, bent, and whispered in his ear. Bolton took the paper in one hand, slowly crumpled it into a tight wad and threw it in a wastebasket beneath the table he faced. He looked sterner and more uncompromising than ever.

"Drama in the courtroom," Silk whispered. "Did you see what the old boy did?"

"He's a fool," Quinn muttered. "A stubborn, thick-headed idiot. The man knows his life hangs in the balance, and he won't bend an inch. Sometimes I almost wish I was convinced of his guilt."

Silk laughed softly. "Watch it, sir. The mass hysteria is taking you in, too. Oh-oh—here comes His Honor."

Tony Quinn went into action a few moments later. He was the thundering, prying, smiling and frowning expert on juries. He battled the opposition to a standstill and brought out beads of sweat on Bolton's face. Twice the gallery

threatened to break into applause until the judge warned that this case could easily be held behind locked doors.

There were thirteen people in the jury box when court adjourned at four o'clock. Four women and nine men. Quinn listened to them being sworn and instructed. Inwardly he was seething. He had to put on a good performance, really push the trial along.

As Tony Quinn it was his duty. As the Black Bat he was acting against himself, for the Black Bat had little to go on and was, nevertheless, half convinced of Bolton's innocence. Furthermore, as the Black Bat, Quinn guessed he was on the brink of discovering a murderer as astute as any he had ever battled. A man who worked completely alone and yet had the use of a hundred-odd thousand people to help him. Everyone in Norwood was on his side.

"Silk," Quinn said, "make some crack to Lieutenant Johnson about those men with broken arms. Find out who the character between them is. My guess is that those two got mixed up with a threshing machine named Butch."

Silk performed his little act to perfection.

"The squat guy with the bullet head is Luke Markey, the local big shot crook," he told Quinn. "The two guys with him are his bodyguards. Markey hates J.B., and I imagine this is the first time he's ever been in court as a spectator."

"Hmm," Quinn mused softly. "We've got quite an assembly of hate gathered here. Markey, whom J.B. has slapped about plenty. Lieutenant Johnson, whose brother died in prison where J.B. sent him. Dennis Waring, who has a violent temper if all indications are correct, and who has good reason to hate J.B. Also a darned good reason to hope he fries. Because if he does, Ellen may come into the Bolton fortune, and that means Dennis shares in it. Which gives me an idea."

He arose. "Lead me to where Bolton's attorneys are holding their strategy conference, Silk."

Bolton's chief attorney, James Loomis, was bald, angular, thin-faced and not too friendly.

"I hope you don't take this matter as a personal battle, Mr. Loomis," Quinn said. "I'm only doing my duty, you know."

"And doing it rather heatedly," Loomis grumbled. "Quinn, if I hadn't learned a great deal about you, I'd suspect you were grandstanding."

"To what end?" Quinn argued. "What can I gain if I win this case? I'm a blind man. I wouldn't care about advancing myself any further. There are enough handicaps now. But your client could help himself by dropping some of that stuffiness. Or pride. Or that too-much-money attitude which characterizes him. What good is his money now? If he goes to the chair, who'll spend it? He has disowned his daughter, he hasn't a friend—"

"I am his friend," Loomis snapped. "Dr. Dunbar is his friend, and Ellen loves him. What happens to his money is no concern of yours, Mr. Quinn."

Quinn rubbed his chin. "Perhaps it is, Mr. Loomis. It could have a bearing on this case. Perhaps remotely, but I could ask him about it when he gets on the stand."

"Over every objection I can shout. What's behind this, Quinn? J.B. doesn't want the terms of his will broadcast to these morbid, bloodthirsty people of Norwood."

"Then maybe you'll tell me where his money goes," Quinn countered. "It's of no interest to me except as prosecutor, and if the disposition of his wealth has no bearing on the case, I'll forget it, and certainly not ask him about it on the stand."

LOOMIS hesitated, bit his lip and then took the plunge.

"You're hijacking me for this, Quinn, but I have an idea what you're after. You think he may have left a substantial sum to Atkinson's widow, who happens to be a most attractive woman. You're

trying to bring in a fresh motive. It won't work. Ellen gets the bulk of his estate. Dr. Dunbar inherits a hundred thousand dollars. There are a few bequests to servants, and that is all."

"Dunbar, eh?" Quinn looked surprised. "He really is a friend of J.B.?"

"Don't be silly," Loomis snapped. "Dunbar is a wealthy man in his own right. The hundred thousand is nothing more than a token of their long friendship. Now, if that is quite all, I'll be going. And I might add, Mr. Quinn, that I have a feeling that I've been pumped. Good day."

"Dry, Mr. Loomis," Quinn whispered at the defense attorney's departing back. "You were pumped bone-dry, and perhaps you've helped your client more than you realize. . . ."

At nine-thirty that night, Silk drove up before the largest building in Norwood, where Jonathan Bolton maintained his central offices. He helped Tony Quinn out of the car and they crossed the sidewalk toward the entrance. A patrolman, casually making his way along the street, picked up some speed.

"Hey!" he called. "That building closes at eight-thirty."

Quinn's sightless eyes turned vaguely in the direction of the cop. "Yes, I know. Who are you?"

"Who am I?" the cop retorted sarcastically. "What's the matter, buddy?"

Silk broke in. "Officer, this is Mr. Quinn. The District Attorney from New York. He happens to be blind."

The cop gulped and cut off the half-strangled sarcasm already issuing from his throat.

"Oh—excuse me. It's kinda dark here, Mr. Quinn. I didn't recognize you. Now, if you want to get into the building, just push that button. There's a watchman. He'll come—in his own good time, but he'll come."

"Thank you, Officer," Quinn said. "Ring the bell, will you, Silk?"

The cop was right about one thing. The watchman required a full ten minutes before he showed up, and then he

was reluctant about letting anyone in. Quinn showed him his District Attorney's badge, and that worked miracles.

The watchman took them to the floor where Jonathan Bolton's office was located, and left them there. It seemed he had a date with a coffee pot that was probably boiling over in the basement.

He did unlock Bolton's main office door though, and pointed at the seals closing the private office.

"You can't go in there, mister," he informed. "Lieutenant Johnson says anybody busts those seals gets to land in jail."

"I'll take that chance," Quinn said, and laughed. "Break the seals, Silk."

They stepped into Bolton's large office and snapped on the lights. Silk rapidly examined a supply closet, closed the door, and even checked on the adjoining office. He reported everything clear, and Quinn dropped his mask of blindness.

He sat down behind Bolton's desk.

"Silk," he said, "did you notice the bulletin board in the lobby? Dennis Waring, J.B.'s son-in-law, has an office on the sixth floor. And Bolton's firm of attorneys occupies a suite on the eleventh."

"Funny that Waring should rent an office in the building of a man he hates as much as he does Bolton," Silk observed.

Quinn shrugged. "Maybe J.B. owns so many buildings in town that Waring had no choice. We'll look around here, and then I'm going downstairs and see if

Dennis Waring maintains any skeletons in his supply closet. I wouldn't mind a peek at the files in the law office either, though it isn't ethical, seeing I'm opposing them in court."

"Ethics be hanged," Silk grunted. "But won't it be a bit dangerous, snooping?"

Quinn winked and unbuttoned his coat and shirt. Under his street clothes he wore the thin, closer fitting outfit of the Black Bat.

"I came prepared, Silk," he murmured. "Well, let's begin here. I'm especially interested in the office next door, where Atkinson met his death."

THEY examined that room carefully. "Nothing is supposed to have been disturbed here," Quinn said, "and from the amount of dust, I'd say we're the first people to enter since Lieutenant Johnson sealed it up. One dominant thing occurs to me."

Silk nodded. "There wasn't a struggle. The murderer either crept up behind Atkinson, or Atkinson trusted him and wasn't prepared for the attack. I wonder why J.B. didn't heard the commotion. There must have been some noise. You can't strangle a grown man without his kicking about a bit."

"The door between the offices is thick," said Quinn. "I imagine it may be almost sound proofed. Now there is one more thing. Atkinson wouldn't have tried to use J.B.'s private elevator. As I

[Turn page]

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understand it, nobody ever used that except J.B. And that should exclude the murderer from using it, because the car is easily watched in the lobby. So the killer entered that door which leads into the main corridor. I looked at it a moment ago. It's fixed so it cannot be opened from the outside without a key. Therefore, the killer must have had one. A small clue, but it may grow into something."

"Except for one thing, sir," objected Silk. "You're disregarding the fact that J.B. may be the actual killer."

"True," Quinn agreed. He arose and began peeling off his outer clothing. "You could be right, too. I'm going for J.B.'s innocence because several things have happened which indicate someone doesn't want J.B.'s innocence established. The normal reaction would be to judge J.B. guilty, and the victim of a neat frame. But in this case we're not justified in accepting such a conclusion. It could be that all this is being done in opposition to us, because J.B. is so thoroughly hated that certain parties want nothing to interfere with his trip to the chair."

"I believe he killed Atkinson," Silk observed. "We know he shot Ventres. He admits that. But I, too, believe we should be absolutely certain."

CHAPTER IX

The High Trap



QUINN had ceased to exist. In his place stood the somberly clad figure of the Black Bat, hood in place, black gloves drawn tightly over supple fingers, automatic butt protruding slightly from beneath the coat.

The Black Bat, after accomplishing his transformation in the inner office, returned to Jonathan Bolton's private office and studied the large

vault. It was flush with the wall, probably imbedded in concrete, but it was an old safe. He went over to it, knelt, and put an ear close to the combination. He removed one glove, turned the dial slowly and kept at it for more than twenty minutes.

His abnormally acute hearing detected the fall of the tumblers. His fingertips, made sensitive during his long period of blindness, felt the tumblers slip. Finally he turned the handle and the safe door swung open.

"I could make a living this way," he chuckled behind the hood. "But only if I tackled nothing but these rather old boxes. Let's see what's inside."

There were dusty ledgers, fireproof boxes of papers valuable only to Jonathan Bolton. They found an old family album. Half of it was filled with snapshots of Ellen Waring, depicting the various stages of her growth from childhood into lovely young womanhood.

"The old boy is more sentimental than I thought," the Black Bat muttered. "He apparently has a tough hide and a thin-skinned heart. Find anything, Silk?"

Silk was going through the contents of an especially strong box. The lock resisted his efforts for about five minutes, proving it to be a good lock because Silk happened to be an expert at picking them.

"There's a bunch of age-yellowed letters in here," he said. "All from his wife before they were married. He's sentimental, all right. But there's something else, sir. A trifle more modern, and it throws a blacker light on J.B.'s protests of innocence."

"Read whatever is on the note," the Black Bat ordered.

"It's a threatening letter, in a mild sort of way. It says that if J.B. goes through with his plans, the writer will reveal something which J.B. has spent a fortune keeping secret. That's all, sir. The letter was signed by Henry Ventres."

"The man J.B. shot and killed." The Black Bat took the letter from Silk and

glanced at it. "There's no date, but from the looks of the ink, it was written no more than a year ago. Perhaps only a short time before J.B. killed Ventres."

"I wonder what Ventres had on him," Silk mused. "You've got to admit that this puts J.B. in a worse position. Now he has a definite motive for killing Ventres."

The Black Bat nodded. "You're right, of course. I may arrange to bring this into the trial, if necessary. Well, we'll lock up the safe. I've noted down the combination, Silk. You'd better have it, just in case there's some trouble. I'd hate to have the Black Bat caught with it on his person."

Silk took the slip of paper. "I'd hate to have the Black Bat caught, sir, under any circumstances. Especially in this town where he doesn't seem to be any too well liked."

The Black Bat stood by while Silk locked the safe.

"I'm going down to Waring's office," the hooded man said. "You'd better keep a sharp eye out, just in case anyone comes. And hide the cane and clothing of Tony Quinn."

The Black Bat used the stairway to reach the floor where Waring's office was located. He let himself into it after the use of a slender pick that came from a set of rather remarkable burglar tools.

Waring's quarters consisted of two small rooms, modestly furnished. Quinn unlocked his desk without a twinge of conscience, and began studying its contents. In ten minutes he knew that Waring was on the verge of bankruptcy. He required a substantial sum of cash—and soon—to meet his obligations. Some of the people he owed were becoming serious about collecting.

Quinn closed the desk. He had turned on no lights, because he needed none. He sat there in the darkness, quietly thinking things over. Silk was right. The letter from Ventres would be excellent proof that Jonathan Bolton had a good reason for murdering him. But who had killed Ventres' widow? The

Black Bat did not give much credence to the suicide theory. It was almost too obvious.

THE PART of this whole case that rankled was the fact that Bolton *could* be guilty, and all suspicious moves on the part of some mysterious person were only to insure Bolton's conviction.

Lieutenant Johnson, for example, possessed a highly personal reason for wanting to see Bolton die in the chair. Dr. Dunbar would inherit a large sum upon Bolton's death, and that was another motive. Though it had to be discounted in the face of Dr. Dunbar's alleged wealth. Certainly he had no other reason for framing Jonathan Bolton. They were old friends.

Now it seemed that Dennis Waring had a double motive—that of hatred for the man, and because his wife would inherit Bolton's fortune. Waring could use a slice of it right now.

The Black Bat was so steeped in thought that he was not at first aware of the sirens. But they were louder now, and more insistent. He hurried to the window overlooking the street. Police cars were pulling up haphazardly. A patrol wagon stopped in the middle of the street and at least a dozen police, armed with rifles, emerged. They all headed for the entrance of the building.

The Black Bat raced for the door, closed it softly behind him and ran down a couple of flights. When his acute hearing was able to pick up the words of the men in the lobby, he stopped to listen.

Lieutenant Johnson's voice was giving the orders.

"Now you men understand what you are to do. This whole building is sealed off. Nobody can get out of it. Our tip is that the Black Bat is here and we're going to get him. He's dangerous, so if you see anyone in a black hood, shoot to kill! Now get going. Every office on every floor is to be thoroughly searched. The elevator power is cut off, so he can't use them. We'll tackle the building floor

by floor!"

The Black Bat fled up three flights. Then he sat down on the steps to listen and think. If Johnson and his men explored every nook in this big building and found no trace of the Black Bat, but did discover blind Tony Quinn and Silk Kirby blandly at work in Jonathan Bolton's office, the lieutenant was going to be suspicious.

If he intensified the search and discovered the Black Bat's regalia, either beneath Tony Quinn's clothing or hidden somewhere on the premises, his suspicions would become strong enough to act upon. Especially since it was so well known that Captain McGrath, in Quinn's home city had long suspected Tony Quinn of being the Black Bat.

He heard two men coming up the stairs one flight below. Quietly he moved up two more flights. In half an hour he was nearing the top.

He rushed to Bolton's offices to look for Silk, but there were no sign of him. Then the Black Bat hurried to the roof. That would be the most dangerous trap of all. There was only one stairway to it and the building towered high above anything else in the neighborhood. There was no getting off that roof!

On the sixteenth floor, the Black Bat peered from the fire stairway door into the long corridor. A lone patrolman, looking worried, was slowly walking in his direction. The cop held his nightstick in one hand, gun in the other.

The stairway doors were heavy, and equipped with spring hinges to keep them tightly closed. The Black Bat carefully opened the door, stepped behind it, and held it in this position. The patrolman spotted the open doorway and moved toward it. He was passing through when the Black Bat let go of the door and added strength to the spring hinges by giving it a terrific push.

The door hit the patrolman squarely, sent him reeling backward. Before he could get set, the Black Bat leaped upon him. A black-gloved fist cracked once against the cop's jaw, and that was suf-

ficient. He went down. The Black Bat caught him before he crashed. He dragged the man into the stairway landing and left him there.

Then the Black Bat scampered up a flight to the floor where Jonathan Bolton's private office was located. He reached a hall closet in which the fuse boxes were kept, forced the lock, and promptly cut every light. As he stepped out of the closet, a flashlight's beam came sweeping down the hall. He had to duck back.

There were voices, indicating that more than one officer was prowling the corridor, and with the lights having just winked out, they had realized someone must have tampered with the fuse boxes. Likely they would know where those boxes were located, too, and head straight for this supply closet.

CAREFULLY the Black Bat leveled his gun. They were coming his way, all right. He knew he couldn't shoot them down in cold blood, even though they had instructions he was to be killed on sight. Darkness was no longer his ally. They were equipped with flashlights, and if he left the security of this closet, he would be an open target. But if he remained, all he could do was charge them when they opened the door.

Then, distantly and somewhat muffled, he heard two quick shots. These were followed by angry, excited voices. The patrolmen in the corridor raced for the stairs and pounded down them. The Black Bat followed at a respectable distance. The shots must have been fired by Silk, who may have guessed or known the Black Bat was in a trap. This meant that Silk must also be in trouble by this time.

The Black Bat hurried down two flights of stairs. He could hear Lieutenant Johnson exhorting his men to more and more speed.

"Remember, he was shooting at us!" Johnson yelled. "He's on this floor! He couldn't get down because I posted plenty of men. He couldn't have gone

up because there are two men in every stairway."

The Black Bat rounded one of the flights. Silk must be somewhere between him and Lieutenant Johnson. Silk would try to reach Bolton's offices again, so he would be going up, not down. And there were men waiting. The Black Bat moved softly now. Here there were lights because the fuses he had pulled controlled only the seventeenth floor. He heard shuffling feet, leaned carefully over the stair railing, and peered down the stairwell.

Two cops were standing side by side with rifles at ready. Half a flight below them, pressed close against the wall, was Silk, looking extremely uncomfortable. The Black Bat pointed his gun downward and fired. He put the slug between the two cops, practically burning their ears off.

They shouted, began running up the stairs, and Silk was not far behind them. The Black Bat plunged onto the sixteenth floor and raced down the corridor. At any moment both stairways at each end of the hall would erupt armed police and he would be trapped!

Then he heard a defiant yell and a single shot. It came from Silk's small caliber gun, not from one of the bigger weapons the police carried. The Black Bat ran for the north stairway, pushed open the door and found it deserted. Silk had drawn the men from it with that shot and yell.

The Black Bat went up a flight, hurried to the south stairway and there he found two policemen posted. Somewhere below them was Silk, and right behind him must be Lieutenant Johnson and his horde of cops.

The Black Bat leveled his gun.

"Don't move!" he warned both cops. "Drop those guns, and do it without making much noise. Now, walk backwards up these stairs. Keep your arms high . . . That's it. Keep coming."

At this moment the Black Bat sorely missed Butch. The giant would have leaped down at both men and disposed of

them in short order. The Black Bat didn't have the weight to accomplish that feat, and it was too dangerous, besides.

He heard shouts below, then a soft whistle. That would be Silk, signaling for speed!

CHAPTER X

The Black Bat's Dilemma



DELIBERATELY the Black Bat clubbed his gun. He struck one of the patrolmen across the back of the head. The other one turned quickly and made a grab at the Black Bat's legs. A fist smashed into his face and he let go, lost his balance, and tumbled down the steps. Neither man was badly hurt, but both were unconscious.

Silk hurdled them on his way up. Together he and the Black Bat raced for Jonathan Bolton's private office, opened the door, and fled inside. The Black Bat took the time to lock it. Silk was already at the big safe, turning the combination and consulting the slip in his hand. He got the door open. As the Black Bat peeled off the somber regalia, they were working against time.

Everything went into Bolton's big safe where it was hastily covered with anything handy. Silk closed the door, spun the combination, and wiped off the dial with his handkerchief.

Cane thrust under his arm, Tony Quinn hurried to a clothes closet in the adjoining office. It was equipped with a regulation key lock. He and Silk stepped inside, closed the door, and Quinn took from his pocket a slim pair of pliers which he had kept out from the kit of burglar tools which the Black Bat had carried. He inserted the fine tips into the lock, grasped the key lightly and turned it.

He looked around in the inky darkness of the closet and was grateful for his uncanny sight. Two of Jonathan Bolton's suits hung neatly on hangers. He dropped the pliers into the inner pocket of one coat.

"We may get away with it, and we may not," Quinn told Silk in a whisper. "But there's nothing else left for us to do. Silk, did you hear or see anyone when I left you to investigate Waring's office?"

"No sir. Not a soul."

"Someone saw me—or the Black Bat, of course. Whoever it was telephoned the police. The same thing happened at the Ventres house. Our tracks cross with those of a killer often enough, but so far he's had all the breaks. I haven't even had a glimpse of him."

"They're coming, I think," Silk whispered. "I heard a voice."

"Lieutenant Johnson is shouting orders," said Quinn. "They're still in the hallway, but they'll soon come in here. Follow my lead, Silk. You and I are known to have entered the building, so our only chance is to say that we were victims of the Black Bat. Anyway, it may serve to bring the killer more into the open . . . All right—start kicking at the door. Not too hard. You've been banging on it until you're all tired out."

Quinn sat down on the floor, and kept striking the crook of his cane against the lower part of the door while Silk pounded weakly with both fists on the upper part. Nobody heard them for moments, then Lieutenant Johnson was in the room, telling his men to keep their guns ready. He was warning that this could be a trick.

He turned the key, yanked the door open, and Silk and Tony Quinn were faced by a dozen leveled weapons. Quinn struggled to his feet, blundered forward and struck the side of the door with his elbow. He kept on going, straight in the face of all those guns, until Lieutenant Johnson grasped his arm.

Quinn tried to shake him off.

"It's okay, Mr. Quinn," Johnson said. "This is Lieutenant Johnson. What hap-

pened here? How'd you get in?"

"Johnson!" Quinn gasped. "Thank heaven. I thought we'd smother to death in that closet. Did you get him?"

"Who?" Johnson asked suspiciously.

"The Black Bat! He was here. Silk and I were looking over the room where Atkinson was killed. Then the Black Bat came. Don't ask me where he'd been hiding. Even Silk couldn't tell you that. At any rate he had a gun and made us sit down."

"Just one second." Johnson turned to his men. "Spread out again. He's still here. Keep going with the room-by-room search. He can't have escaped."

"No one has ever cornered him yet," Silk put in.

"He's trapped this time," Johnson snapped. "Now, let's have the details."

"It was necessary that I see these premises through Silk's eyes," Quinn said, "so I'd know what I was talking about when the actual trial begins tomorrow. We arrived . . . Oh yes, one of your patrolmen helped us get in, told us how to summon the watchman. We'd just about concluded our work when the Black Bat aimed a gun at us."

"He told us to sit down," Silk said. "We—did."

"We had quite a discussion of the case," Quinn explained. "As you may know, the Black Bat has helped me before, but this time I think he's wrong. He told me he is convinced that J.B. is innocent, and the victim of a frameup."

JOHNSON was studying Quinn frowningly. "He did, eh?" Johnson growled. "Mr. Quinn, if we don't find the Black Bat in here, I'm afraid we'll have to—well, at least search you and your friend Silk. It's this way. A man simply cannot vanish. The Black Bat was here, now he seems to be gone, but you are here. It follows that I must suspect you."

"Me? Of being the Black Bat?" Quinn laughed. "Lieutenant, I'd do much better as a blind bat."

"Yes. Yes, I know. But Silk has eyes.

Anyway, from what happened here the Black Bat seemed to be in two or three places at the same time. I give the guy credit, but he's not that good. I had a hunch he might be two people."

"I suggest you search us at once," Quinn said. "And search these rooms as well. Just what would you look for, Lieutenant?"

"The outfit the Black Bat wears. Guns—things like that."

Tony Quinn raised both arms high. "I'm ready," he offered.

Johnson frisked them both, and did a careful job of it. Then he went to work inspecting the rooms. He studied the safe, tried the handle and the combination and shrugged. It was hardly likely any stranger could have opened that. He patted the suits hanging in the closet, but missed the tiny pair of pliers.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "But you can't blame me, Mr. Quinn. I still don't believe in miracles, even though that guy in black seems to have pulled one. Now, tell me what he wanted."

"The same thing we did," Quinn said. "To inspect the premises. He asked me to postpone the trial, and I refused. He did his best to convince me of J.B.'s innocence, but he failed there."

"If J.B. didn't do it, who does he think did?" Johnson's eyes were slightly narrowed.

"He refused to name names, but indicated there is a man whom he believes guilty. He did say he wouldn't stop until he had gathered enough evidence to convict this man and free J.B. Frankly, the man has never been a liar, but this time he is mistaken."

"You're going ahead with the trial?"

"Most assuredly. Within two days I'll have the case in the hands of the jury, and I'll get a conviction. Now may we go?"

"Sure. I know neither of you can be the Black Bat. Not unless we find that outfit around somewhere, and we're going to look. See you in court tomorrow."

"Of course." Quinn hesitated. "Lieutenant, how in the world did you dis-

cover the Black Bat was here? He seemed mighty certain that his presence wasn't known."

"We got a tip on the phone. Looks like somebody gets around almost as fast as the Black Bat does—and in the same places."

Quinn, on Silk's arm, walked to an elevator which Lieutenant Johnson placed in operation for them. In a few moments they were outside, and Silk was driving away, still a bit shaken by their close escape.

"I used to shudder when Captain McGrath back in New York got on the war-path," Silk said. "But he isn't as dangerous as this man Johnson. I think Johnson still suspects one of us is the Black Bat."

"The man who tipped Johnson twice about the Black Bat worries me a great deal more, Silk," Quinn said uneasily. "Is it possible that we've been trailed? Try some evasion tactics, and see if we can find out. Don't be obvious about it, but try anyway."

For half an hour Silk made quick turns, quicker stops, and sudden spurts of speed. There was no one on their trail.

"He'd hardly have dropped us," Quinn said thoughtfully. "Perhaps he just happened to be in the building. When I was seen—or when the Black Bat was seen—it must have been at the time I was near Waring's office. I wonder if he could have been going there himself."

"The only man I know who'd have business at Waring's office this time of night would be Waring himself, sir," Silk said. "Have you given any thought of that?"

"Yes, I have." Tony Quinn nodded emphatically. "Waring is coming in for a little more attention on our part. Drive back to the hotel. Later we'll see if we can pay a return visit to Bolton's office and retrieve the Black Bat's clothes. Until then, I've got to lay low. That was the only outfit I brought along. Working away from our base of operations is a handicap, Silk. . . ."

WELL AFTER midnight the Black Bat emerged from the side door of the hotel alone. He wore a dark blue suit and that wide-brimmed black hat. A pair of dark glasses helped some, too, but he felt as if a glaring light shone on him.

The rented car was handy and he slipped into it and drove away. When he reached the tall building in which J.B. had his offices, he drove past it at a moderate clip. There were two patrolmen posted outside the door, and several police cars were still there. Lieutenant Johnson did not give up easily.

The Black Bat kept going. Every move he made now was dangerous, for the whole city would be alerted against him. He drove out to the house where Mrs. Ventres had been poisoned. That, at least, was deserted and he had an easy time getting inside.

There had been little chance of completely searching the place before and he proceeded to do so now. The bottle of poison and the glass were, of course, gone. The Black Bat became especially interested in the silver drawer of the dining room buffet. He examined each teaspoon carefully, and found one that was discolored. All the others had been kept nicely polished, but this particular spoon was brownish. He confiscated the spoon for examination later, and began wondering if Carol had learned anything about Mrs. Ventres' last expedition before her death.

He picked up the telephone and called the hotel to which she had moved. When the connection was complete he asked for her, using the assumed name she had adopted. The phone was answered almost at once.

"Hello," the Black Bat said. "How's everything?"

"Good enough," Carol replied cagily. "Why don't you drop over and see me? There's a matter I'd like to discuss with you as soon as possible. Tell you what—I'll even put a light in my window. Maybe that will make you come over."

"You can expect me," the Black Bat

said. "There's no particular rush, is there?"

"We'll—no, I guess not. But our business won't wait longer than tomorrow."

"Tomorrow it is then," the Black Bat said, and knew Carol would realize he would be there as quickly as possible.

Something had happened. Carol rarely became worried, but there was a genuine note of it in her voice now, a bit of anxiety.

Reaching her would not be easy. He knew nothing about her hotel, not even the location of her room. She must have intended to inform him of that in saying she would put a light in her window. Perhaps she had a way of showing him how to enter. The Black Bat hurried to where his car was parked, and drove back to town.

He circled the block where her hotel was situated, and soon saw what she meant. In one of the third floor rooms, a bridge lamp had been moved so that it shone directly out of a window, illuminating the fire-escape landing just outside.

Carol, as usual, was on the job all right!

CHAPTER XI

The Unknown Dead



PARKING his car in the same block, the Black Bat got out and walked boldly along the street. He passed several pedestrians who never gave him a second glance. A patrolman cast a curious eye his way but sauntered on by, swinging his nightstick. The Black Bat, in the ordinary clothing of Tony Quinn, gave absolutely no indication of nervousness.

The one thing in his favor was the fact that so few people had seen him often enough, or close enough, to make an identification. The dark glasses hid



BUTCH

those scars around his eyes which might have aroused some attention, and the broad-brimmed hat helped some, too.

He glanced over his shoulder, saw that the side street was clear, and darted quickly into an alley. Soon he was standing below the fire-escape and trying to see whether or not the weighted ladder was so rusty it would howl an alarm when he leaped for it and brought the ladder down.

He had to take the chance. If it squealed too much, he was prepared to let go quickly and disappear. Under his weight the ladder came down. It made a grating sound, but nothing which might be heard far. He swarmed up the ladder, reached the landing outside the brightly illuminated window, and called Carol's name in a low voice.

There was no answer. His worries increased. Carol had been alarmed. Then he heard the faint splashing of the shower. He could look across the room and see the closed bathroom door. He felt a trifle easier. His worries just about

ceased when he heard Carol's voice, muffled but clear enough to be easily identified as she sang gaily.

He reached through the window, twisted the floor lamp so its full light wouldn't fall on him, and prepared to clamber through into the room. As the floor lamp moved, he saw two feet protruding from beneath the edge of the sitting room divan. They were awkwardly placed and not the feet of someone who lay there waiting to pounce.

The Black Bat climbed into the room and quickly shut off the light. His eyes needed no adjusting to the darkness. They saw quite clearly and as he came around the divan, he exhaled sharply.

The feet belonged to a wizened-faced, slim little man who wore a knife in his heart. It had been driven to the hilt through his back. The Black Bat sat down slowly. He was aware that the sound of the shower had ceased. So had Carol's singing. He arose, went to the door and tapped on it.

"I'm here," he said. "And I'm not the

only visitor. You've got a dead man in your sitting room."

Carol opened the door. She was partially dressed. She didn't scream nor avert her eyes from the form now dimly illuminated by the light from the other room as she saw the body.

"It's the man who has been following me," she said softly.

"Following you?" the Black Bat asked. "Look, Carol, finish dressing and make a quick job of it. I'll see if I can find out who this man is. We'll have time for explanations later, but right now we'd better be ready to move fast."

Carol asked no questions. She disappeared into the bedroom. In less than ten minutes she was back, fully dressed, and stuffing a small gun into her purse.

The Black Bat, kneeling beside the dead man, arose slowly and came toward her.

"I searched him," he said. "It was no use. He'd already been searched. Now tell me about him."

"I first noticed the little fellow about ten o'clock," she said quickly, "when I went to the morgue at the local newspaper office. I'd just returned from trying to trace Mrs. Ventres' mystery trip. The man was standing outside the newspaper building and for a moment I thought he was going to stop me. But he acted frightened and turned away. Then, when I came out, I saw him a block behind me. I thought I'd thrown him off the trail, because I lost sight of him then."

"And you have no idea who he is or what he wanted?" Quinn asked.

"Not the slightest. Isn't there something on the man by which he can be identified?"

"Nothing. He looks to me like a bum. His pockets are full of junk, but nothing with names or addresses on it. Might be a laundry mark somewhere on his clothes, but we've no time or facilities for tracing it. Obviously the man wanted to see you and did not want anyone else to know it. He must have picked the lock of your door. It's easily opened."

CAROL shuddered and kept her gaze away from the body.

"I'm lucky he wasn't a murderer," she said. "He frightened me for a time but after you called, I felt reassured. Why didn't I hear him cry out when he was knifed?"

"You were under the shower. That's why the murderer wasn't afraid to strike. And the victim probably never uttered a sound. That knife was driven up between his ribs and he died almost instantly. Perhaps he never even saw his murderer."

"But why was he killed? How could it be dangerous to someone if this man talked to me?"

"I could offer a few ideas, but with nothing to back them up, I'd rather not. The fact remains he is dead and that his murder was a precautionary measure. Did you learn anything today which this fellow—or anyone—might add to?"

"I learned little," Carol said. "Just that Mrs. Ventres apparently left her home right after you talked to her. She stopped for gas at a station three blocks from her home, and headed the car east. She wasn't gone long, so both her trip and her visit must have been short. That's all I discovered."

"She headed east," Quinn said thoughtfully. "That road leads to the best residential part of town. She must have gone there, but whom did she see? Lieutenant Johnson, Dr. Dunbar, Chief McKenzie, Attorney Loomis, and Ellen and Dennis Waring all live in that section. The only suspect who doesn't is Luke Markey, the gangster. So Mrs. Ventres could have seen any one of them . . . What were you doing in the newspaper morgue, Carol?"

"Acting like a syndicate feature reporter. They were nice about helping me prepare a story on Jonathan Bolton. And Tony, I happened across something else of interest."

"Connected with Bolton?" the Black Bat queried.

"Well—no. It's about a mystery man who goes by the name of John Strange. Nobody knows who he is, but he donates

large sums of money to all sorts of worthy enterprises."

"I heard of him, and he intrigues me," the Black Bat admitted. "But what has he to do with this case?"

"Only that the money comes from out of town," Carol explained. "And I noticed one peculiar thing. Every time a new donation is received, Dr. Dunbar happens to be on a little trip. He always returns the day after. That has happened on at least seven occasions. Maybe more. I didn't have time for further checking."

The Black Bat pursed his lips and whistled softly. Then he shrugged. "Maybe Dunbar is John Strange," he muttered, "but if he is, I wish he'd donate us some of his charity in the form of advice. What are we going to do with this corpse?"

"We just can't leave him and—"

The Black Bat suddenly gripped Carol's arm. "Quiet," he whispered. "The elevator just stopped at this floor and someone is asking for this room. Sounds to me like the law. Have you any luggage here?"

"Just a small bag."

"Get it, quickly. We're going places. If the police ever walk in here now, you'd be in a mess. And our murderer has a knack of tipping the police to all sorts of things. Step on it, Carol."

There was an imperious knocking on the door as the Black Bat helped Carol out of the window onto the fire-escape. Only the law could knock like that.

The Black Bat scrambled down the fire-escape first, counterweighted the ladder and hung from the bottom rung a second before he dropped lightly. Carol followed, jumping into the Black Bat's extended arms. For a moment he held her tightly, his lips against her ear.

"This is the best part of the whole affair, Carol," he whispered. "Holding you closely. It ought to happen more often."

"But not with the police breathing down our necks," she said hurriedly. "What are we going to do?"

"My car is on the side street. I'll

drive you to where your sedan is kept. Get in it and head back to the city. I'm afraid your work is finished here. They'll never trace you. Luckily you maintained two different addresses, but I'd better get Butch out of your rooms at my hotel. Lieutenant Johnson is smart, and if he ties you up with the girl who was living at my hotel, there'll be an alarm out for you. Just follow me. We'll be out of this mess in a moment or two."

THE BLACK BAT put on his dark glasses, pulled down the brim of his hat, and moved toward the street. He took the precaution of peering from the mouth of the alley before venturing out. It was a wise precaution. There was a radio coupé directly behind his car, and two patrolmen were standing in the middle of the sidewalk as if awaiting orders. Somewhere in the distance a siren was wailing, the sound growing stronger with every moment.

The Black Bat put an arm around Carol.

"He did it again—killed, and tipped the police to get here fast," he whispered. "This time to nail you. Somehow he either connected you with my activities, or he suspects the murdered man may have been in touch with you."

A red flasher light began blinking as an official car rolled along the street. Carol and the Black Bat shrank into the darkness of the alley and made their way back. They scaled a low fence, found another alley, and came out on another street. There were no police cars in this vicinity.

They stepped out boldly and the Black Bat saw a taxi parked at the corner. They hurried to it and got in. The Black Bat gave an address close to his own hotel. If necessary he meant to hide Carol there.

The cab pulled away, turned a corner and slowed up. A police car was pulled across the road, blocking it, and a patrolman was waving down the cab with a flashlight.

"Out we go and travel fast!" the

Black Bat whispered.

Carol opened the taxi door, leaped out, and the Black Bat followed. They couldn't help being seen. The patrolman yelled and drew his gun. He fired twice. Both slugs zinged past the two running people, but only made them move faster.

Police whistles shrilled, and they could hear the heavy feet of the law moving to take up positions meant to cut off the fleeing pair. The Black Bat, encumbered by Carol's traveling bag, ran alongside her. He seized her arm suddenly and pulled her toward what seemed to be a tenement house.

They ran up the steps. The Black Bat already had his bunch of pass keys out and ready. He studied the lock for only a second, selected a key, and sweated when it didn't fit. The second one opened the door. He and Carol stepped inside and closed the door gently.

The Black Bat pulled the dirty curtain over the glass in the door aside an inch. Half a dozen uniformed police were hurrying along the street, and others were coming from the opposite direction.

"We'll head for the rear of this house," Quinn whispered in Carol's ear. "Walk softly. Everyone is asleep, so far, but those police will soon wake them up. The moment the police find that dead man in your rooms, they'll start searching every house and we'd better not be here."

"But Tony—you! What if they catch you? We're in trouble!"

"I've been in it up to my neck all evening," the Black Bat said. "My outfit is locked in a vault. I have to operate this way, but if we're cornered it really won't make much difference. One thing—if we do find ourselves hopelessly trapped, you're to keep on going while I hold them back. Is that clear?"

"I'd rather stay and face it with you, Tony," Carol said bravely, "but I know your orders always have plenty of reason behind them. I'll do as you say."

"Good. Then let's try to find the back way out before they seal up the other street!"

Run for Your Life



EXITING safely, the Black Bat and Carol crossed a yard littered with debris, but thanks to the Black Bat's unusual sight, they made little noise. They entered the back yard of another home, passed through this and reached the street.

They crouched behind a neatly trimmed hedge. Carol raised herself a trifle. She saw a man in plainclothes, but with the assured bearing of a detective, take up a post at the curbing a hundred yards down the street. Carol sank back out of sight and huddled under the protection of the Black Bat's arm.

"We're trapped!" she whispered. "They've sealed off this street, too. They're spreading out, Tony. Pretty soon every avenue of escape will be covered."

The Black Bat said nothing but grasped her wrist and swung around. Still protected by the hedge they moved away. This was the business section of the city, but like most towns of this size a certain area refused to give way to progress, and these old houses were surrounded by store and office buildings.

"There's a bar a block and a half down the street," the Black Bat said softly. "No policemen seem to be in the way but these yards end against that brick wall, and we'll have to go out onto the street. It means watching that detective and ducking from door to door, but it can be done. Ready?"

"Yes," Carol breathed sharply. "Now I know how these people feel when we're chasing them."

The Black Bat attempted a chuckle, but it was a distinct failure. "But with one difference," he reminded. "We haven't done anything, so our con-

sciences are clear."

He stood erect. His weird eyesight enabled him to spot the detective, though the man had now moved into the shadows of a tall tree. The detective was looking in the other direction. The Black Bat whispered, and Carol dodged out to the sidewalk, down it and into the nearest doorway. The Black Bat followed on her heels.

They were barely in time for, as the Black Bat ducked into the doorway, he saw the detective turning as if he sensed there might be something of interest in the opposite direction.

The doorway was shallow and offered scant protection. If a police car rolled by, they would be spotted. The Black Bat gave Carol whispered instructions, drew his gun, and prepared to hold back the detective if he spotted Carol as she hugged the building line and made for the next doorway. It was a long haul, but fortunately her clothing was dark and blended well with the gloom.

The Black Bat soon joined her. By degrees they reached the corner and crossed the still more dangerous side street. There were several men at the end of it.

Then they saw a heavy truck lumbering along that side street. They crossed the street before the weak headlights of the truck revealed them, wheeled, and ran alongside the rear end of the truck while it crossed the main artery.

If the detective was watching he could have seen nothing. In a few more moments, they walked into the café. It was noisy, rather crowded, and smelled of stale beer and tobacco smoke. They found an empty booth and squirmed behind the table.

The Black Bat gave his order to a waiter without looking up or showing much of his face. The drinks were brought. He paid for them, and added a good tip. Then he waited until they were as alone as they could be in a place like this.

"It's possible they have a description of you," he told Carol in a low voice. "So

I'll have to go to the phone booths. We need help, and rather desperately. If anyone who looks like police comes in while I'm gone, get away if you can. Otherwise wait until the lights go out. Then head for the left end of the bar. I'll be there."

"Tony," she whispered, "I'm scared stiff."

"So am I." He grinned reassuringly. "Being pinned down this way with all avenues of escape closed to us isn't comfortable. Even Captain McGrath's face would be a welcome sight right now, and I never thought I'd be saying that. I'll hurry!"

He threaded his way between tables, passed the crowded bar and nobody paid any attention to him. The tier of three phone booths was in a conveniently dark corner, and none of the booths were being used. He stepped into one, pulled the door shut, and dialed the number of his hotel. He asked for his room.

SILK answered in a voice filled with worry. The Black Bat gave terse instructions. Silk listened intently.

"Very well," he said at last. "I can hear all the commotion even up here. Every cop in town must be in the area. I've now exactly one thirty-three. Does that jibe?"

"On the dot." The Black Bat was checking his own watch. "At one fifty-five we'll be ready. Are you certain Butch is able to operate?"

"He's been beefing his head off for action," Silk said. "One fifty-five it is, sir."

The Black Bat returned to the booth and told Carol his plans. They were risky, depended greatly upon the element of time and luck, but there was no other way out. The waiter descended on them and the Black Bat ordered another drink. He was not even aware he had consumed the first one. Carol nursed hers and kept up an idle chatter while the waiter was within earshot.

The Black Bat studied his wrist-watch every moment or two. He estimated just

how long it would take them to reach the door, pass through it, and cross the sidewalk.

"This newspaper office you were in a little while ago," he said. "Is it a morning paper?"

She nodded. "Yes. They told me I could stay there all night if I wished."

"Did anyone see you leave?"

"No, I'm sure they didn't. The morgue is reached by a rather deserted second floor corridor. When you go downstairs where most of the activity is centered, you use a stairway that leads almost straight to the front door. I'm certain there aren't many people around at this time of night."

"Good," the Black Bat said. "You need an alibi. If we get out of this trap, go back there. Try to reach the morgue and stay there a little while. Then walk out with what looks like a lot of notes. Be sure you are seen, and comment on the fact that time passed so rapidly you weren't aware of it. Return to my hotel and go to the room you checked into yesterday. If you are questioned, stick to your story. That will be better than running out."

Carol's voice was still worried. "What if they bring someone from that other hotel over and they identify me? I've got an alibi, but it's none too good, and I doubt it will stand up."

"We'll worry about that after you're comparatively safe in your own room. It's two minutes to the deadline. We get up, walk casually to the door. Silk should be there in my car, with Butch seated beside him, wearing some of my clothes, carrying my cane, and acting like a blind man. Butch will step out—I'll take his place. You're to get into the back seat and keep out of sight. Everything clear?"

She nodded, took a long breath, and they arose. They moved along the café floor and were within a dozen yards of the exit when the door opened and two uniformed police stepped in. Behind them came Lieutenant Johnson, leading a squad of detectives.

Carol's fingers closed hard around the Black Bat's arm. They were trapped this time without a chance to make a move. By retreating they would only draw attention to themselves. Lieutenant Johnson began advancing slowly, his eyes scanning the crowd, but not yet centering on the pretty girl who would answer to the description of the occupant of a room where a dead man had been found.

The Black Bat bent and spoke softly in Carol's ear. "I'm depending upon Silk and Butch now. We've nothing left. If they can't act, I'm going after Johnson. When I do, you try to get clear."

There was a man and a girl on the opposite side of the room and Johnson was busy studying them. The girl was about Carol's build and age. Johnson started in their direction.

Then from somewhere down the street came a wild yell followed by the crashing of plate glass. Then more yells, and above them the cry, "Police!"

A cop rushed into the café. "There's a riot at the Flamingo down the street!" he shouted.

Johnson whirled and ran out the door. Carol felt the Black Bat almost wilt. They were pressed forward now by the surge of the excited crowd who wanted to see the fun. On the street, all police were converging on the far more exclusive café in the next block.

THE Black Bat saw Silk drive the big sedan down the street. He was alone. Silk cut into the curb. The crowd passed Carol and the Black Bat. He looked around hastily, then stepped toward the sedan. Silk threw the door open. The Black Bat climbed in. Carol entered the rear of the car and sank to the floor out of sight.

Hastily the Black Bat removed his broad-brimmed hat, replaced it with a more conservative model which Silk handed him. He took the white cane and placed it between his knees.

The Black Bat motioned with his head toward the scene of all the excitement.

"Butch?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIII

Murder Trial

"Butch," Silk replied laconically. "We saw Johnson going into this café and figured you were on a spot, so Butch just hopped out and started a diversion. I told him to get clear if he could."

"You got away with Butch taking my place?"

"Yes, sir. Butch wore your hat, dark glasses, and your coat, with a topcoat over it. He really acted the part well. The elevator operator at night is an old man, and can't see well, anyhow. Besides, he was half asleep. We went through the lobby, out to the car, and headed this way."

"Without being stopped?" Tony Quinn asked.

"We were stopped all right. They had every street blocked, but when I mentioned who we were, they let us through. I'm sure we're all set, sir."

"Good. Now drive close to the newspaper office. Carol is going to drop off there. Then you and I are going back and find out who got murdered in Carol's room."

Ten minutes later they were inside the police lines again. Silk called a uniformed sergeant over to the car. The sergeant recognized Quinn.

"What's going on?" Quinn asked. "There's so much excitement it woke me up."

"We're not sure, sir," the sergeant said. "A petty crook and stool pigeon was found stabbed to death at that old hotel on the corner. A girl had the room, but she got away down the fire-escape. We've been trying to prevent her escape, but I don't know. Looks to me like she got clear."

"Has this anything to do with the Jonathan Bolton affair?" Quinn queried.

The sergeant shook his head. "Can't see the slightest connection, sir. Bert Sinclair — the dead stoolie — probably never even knew J.B. My opinion is that he sang once too often."

"Thank you," Quinn said. "Silk, we can go home now. I was afraid some new development concerning the trial might have exploded."

RESPECTFULLY the police sergeant stepped back as Silk pulled away from the curb. Quinn reached for a handkerchief, removed the dark glasses and mopped his face. Reaching the hotel, Silk parked the car and led Quinn through the

lobby. In their suite, they found Butch tenderly massaging a reddened right fist. The grin on Butch's face was a mile wide.

"We did it, huh?" he gloated. "Boy, I ripped through that café like a strong-arm squad. Haven't had so much fun in a long time. And you know what? That was the dump I was in at the time I was snatched when I first got here! The barkeep was the same guy who tipped those hooligans to come and get me. I busted him good."

Quinn sank into a chair. "You handled it well, Butch. Got Carol and me out of a trap that looked very much like the finish. Were you recognized?"

"The barkeep knew me all right." Butch grinned. "He started swinging a bottle as soon as I headed for him. But he won't talk. He can't, on account of I could have him juggled for framing that snatch. And I'm also pretty sure his jaw is busted. That'll keep him quiet, too."

"Carol should get here soon," Quinn said. "I'm going to send her out of town on a mission. She could be too easily identified, although she is now preparing an alibi that might stick. When she gets here, we'll go over this business."

Silk brought in a thermos of coffee and some cups. He spoke as he poured.

"I don't like this, sir. We're out of our element here. The danger that threatens you constantly is worse than Captain McGrath's planning, or the menace of an organized murder gang. And it isn't

getting us much. By this time tomorrow you'll have J.B. practically strapped in the electric chair."

Quinn nodded. "That's quite true, but before I'm done, someone else is going to take his place. I think I know what I'm after now. The murderer's hand has been forced once too often. What happened at Carol's other hotel suite proves it . . . Thanks for the coffee, Silk. Sit down and relax."

Silk sat on the edge of the chair. "Relax?" He grinned. "I'll have to learn how to do that all over again."

Carol returned safely a few moments later, and the Black Bat's small band gathered over coffee cups to plan their future moves.

"I'm afraid your usefulness here is at an end, Carol," Quinn said. "But I need fast information about this John Strange who has donated enough to this city actually to keep the tax rates down. You've already done some checking, and a suspicion has arisen that Dr. Dunbar may be this anonymous philanthropist. I want to be sure, so you will check out of here early in the morning and begin investigating John Strange in New York, from where his donations seem to originate."

Carol managed a wan smile. "I think you're about ready for the kill, Tony, but after tonight's excitement I'm satisfied to miss that."

Quinn's hand sought hers and held it tightly. He turned to Butch.

"Tonight," he said, "a stool pigeon named Bert Sinclair attempted to see Carol. We don't know why, but as he was a stoolie we may assume he had information to sell. You start checking on him now. I want to know every move he's made in the last couple of days. Everything you can get."

Butch arose. "I'll start now. And I don't think any more of Luke Markey's boys are going to try and stop me."

When Butch had gone, Tony Quinn lit his pipe, leaned back and spoke softly while Carol and Silk listened.

"I'm convinced now that J.B. did not

kill Atkinson, and that he was egged into shooting Ventres. There is a smart character behind all this, but his motive has been as vague as his identity. He killed Mrs. Ventres because she could have exposed him. I think she went to him for advice that night she was poisoned. He murdered a stool pigeon tonight for the same reason. Bert Sinclair had discovered something. My idea is this. Sinclair was a professional informer. That breed exists upon what they are paid for information."

"You mean he was trying to approach me to sell me a news story which might have revealed the killer?" Carol asked.

"No—not exactly," Quinn said. "But it was something which would involve the killer by perhaps exposing him or ruining his motive. The murderer somehow came to know what Sinclair had learned and knifed him to death after Sinclair had trailed you to that hotel."

CAROL'S smooth brow was knitted in a frown.

"But why did he pick on me?" she asked.

"Quite obviously what he knew had potential value and Sinclair wanted more than the local newspaper might be willing to pay. You, supposedly a feature writer for a big syndicate, would be in a position to get him more money."

"That must be the answer," Carol agreed. "And the murderer fixed it for the police to come and find the dead man in my room so I'd be arrested on suspicion and be unable to work on what Sinclair told me, if he had reached me before the killer struck."

"That's it, Carol. I think I know who is responsible for all this. Our clues are scanty, but we've enough suspects. There is Dr. Dunbar who inherits a hundred thousand dollars—motive enough under ordinary circumstances. But Dunbar is supposed to be wealthy. Perhaps rich enough to be this John Strange. And Dunbar hardly seems the type. He's a pleasant sort, with as many friends as J.B. has enemies. Dunbar belongs to

practically every club and lodge, mingles a great deal, and usually takes the lead in all sorts of civic enterprises. Hardly a background for a murderer. But then, this is an unusual case."

"Dennis Waring has a mighty good motive," Silk offered. "Two, in fact. He hates J.B., and would profit through the inheritance his wife would get if J.B. dies in the chair."

"Waring, so far as motives go," Quinn said, "is the most obvious man we have. But don't forget Lieutenant Johnson. As a member of the Force and in charge of handling the investigation, he is in an excellent position to work his points. Johnson's hatred for J.B. is perhaps greater than that of Waring or anyone else. But is plain hate the only motive? I think not."

Carol nodded. "When a man of J.B.'s wealth is involved, there is money in the motive, Tony. There always is."

"I agree, Carol. We also have a crook named Luke Markey to consider. J.B. ran Markey out of town. Or as far out as he could. Markey's influence and success depends upon his connections here. J.B. almost broke them, and perhaps meant to finish the job, so Markey has the dual motive of self-preservation and hatred."

"What about J.B.'s daughter?" Carol asked.

Quinn shook his head. "I'm discounting her entirely. While J.B. treated her rather roughly, I'm sure she still loves the old boy . . . Well, I'll need a few winks for my grandstand play in court tomorrow when the trial begins. I'm going at J.B. hard and, to counter that, we have to work faster than ever. Report to Silk by phone the moment you have anything on John Strange, Carol. . . ."

In the morning, the same crowd was clustered around the courtroom. Again Lieutenant Johnson made Quinn's entry easy. Quinn purposely arrived early, and when he entered the courtroom, he was gratified to see Dennis Waring, his wife Ellen, and all the others already present. Dennis Waring seemed to have been waiting for Quinn for he arose at once

and approached the supposedly blind D.A.

He sat down beside Quinn.

"I'm Dennis Waring," he said. "May I talk to you?"

"Of course, Mr. Waring. Go ahead."

"Ellen—my wife—is on the verge of collapse over all this, Mr. Quinn. If that thick-headed father of hers would only give her a glance or a smile. But he refuses even to acknowledge her presence. He hates me and I'm not especially fond of him, but I'm asking—begging—that I be allowed to talk to him after today's session is over."

"That's a matter for the police to decide," Quinn said coldly.

"But I've asked Chief McKenzie, and he referred me to Johnson. The Chief doesn't run this Department. Johnson does, and Johnson said he couldn't give such permission without your sanction. That's why I've come to you."

"I'm sorry," Quinn said. "I don't believe Mr. Bolton would talk to you, anyway. Why didn't you try to soften him up right after he was arrested?"

"He wouldn't see me. I tried several times. Night before last I talked to Lieutenant Johnson about it. I never got far. He was called out on the suicide of Mrs. Ventres."

"I'll do what I can," Quinn promised. "Right now court is ready to open so if you will excuse me—"

As Waring returned to his chair, Quinn scrawled on a bit of paper and passed it to Silk. The message read:

Find opportunity to circulate and see if you can discover where Luke Markey was at the time of Mrs. Ventres' death. Don't be obvious about it.

SILK nodded and tucked the message into his pocket. Then the bailiff's gavel descended and court was in session.

Quinn went to work. He established the identity of the dead victim, Leon Atkinson, and proved the cause of death as manual strangulation. He called J.B.'s secretary and, by coaxing and browbeat-

ing, wangled her story into the evidence. She told how J.B. had refused to see Atkinson, how the man had come to Bolton's office anyway.

She had heard the fight and had looked in, to see Atkinson on the floor while J.B. had stood over him with murder written on his face.

J.B. had dismissed her after a little while, and then there'd been nothing but silence in the office.

Quinn put witnesses on the stand to prove that Atkinson really had sewed up J.B.'s control of the sprawling factory interests, and how J.B. had promptly taken steps to regain control within minutes after Atkinson was murdered.

J.B.'s servant related the events which had transpired at the house when Ventres had been shot to death. Though J.B. was not on trial for killing Ventres, his actions following the shooting were important to his guilt or innocence in connection with Atkinson's murder.

Quinn harped on J.B.'s methodical handling of things, how he had taken



calm steps to insure his safety and comfort before calling the police.

He had been cold-blooded about the whole thing.

Loomis, attorney for the defense, did his best, but it didn't come close to matching Quinn's skill or impassioned objections to the defense questions. By lunch time the odds on J.B.'s innocence were slim. By the time court adjourned in the afternoon there were no longer any odds. The jury plainly showed by their set faces what the verdict was going to be.

Quinn could have rested his case that day, but he stalled a trifle. He knew the defense couldn't possibly take more than a few hours.

The Bait



HILE Quinn sat back after court was over, Silk joined him.

"I nosed around about Markey," Silk said. "He is never away from that gambling place of his. Runs the biggest wheel personally. When Mrs. Ventres died, he was miles

away."

"Good," Quinn said. "Have you heard from Carol?"

"She left a number at the hotel for me to call and I phoned her. She's traced John Strange's donations back to a financial firm which actually issued the checks, and while they refused to confirm anything, she is certain that Dr. Dunbar is John Strange. He has been a frequent visitor to the financial firm and usually just before some new donation has been made."

"Fine," Quinn said. "Now if only Butch has something. We'll go back and see if he has returned yet. Right after I talk to J.B. Stick close. He's liable to take a swing at me, and I can't duck without showing I'm not blind."

Silk led Quinn over to where J.B. sat in solitary loneliness. Even his guards had taken positions a few yards away. Quinn sat down beside the man, and saw the strain on the financier's face.

"This isn't exactly ethical, Mr. Bolton," Quinn said, "but it happens that a private detective is around town who claims he works for you. I'd like you to confirm that before we take any action."

Bolton's lips parted just the slightest. "There is no one working for me," he said flatly. "No one cares what happens to me. And you're doing an excellent job of sending me to my death for something I did not do."

"Dennis Waring and your daughter are on your side," Quinn said softly. "If

you weren't so pig-headed, you'd see that. I can arrange an interview, but only with your permission. Shall I?"

"Do anything you like." Bolton suddenly raised a hand to his face and bowed his head. "What difference does it make—now?"

Quinn arose and leaned over the man's shoulder. "Anyone as innocent as you profess to be has little to worry about," he whispered. "Nothing ever licked you before. Not even when you were in the wrong. Yet you're not even fighting."

Bolton spoke from behind the hand covering his face. "Why are you telling me this? You who are supposed to condemn me."

"Maybe I like a good fight," Quinn replied. "Maybe there are other reasons. Such as some doubt of your guilt. But if you don't fight at the right time, everything will be lost. I'll send your daughter and son-in-law to see you in that same room where we held our first conference. Remember, you can't win unless you put up some sort of a battle."

Silk led Quinn away. "What in the world was behind that?" he asked.

"It's called a softening-up process," Quinn said, and smiled. "Getting Bolton set to jump to his feet and shout denials of guilt or any lies which are told in court. Our killer fights with psychology and craft, so I'm going to use the same methods . . . Take me back to the hotel. First though, I want to see Ellen Waring."

Silk guided him to where J.B.'s daughter sat with her husband. Dr. Dunbar was at her other side.

"I think your father will consent to see you, Mrs. Waring," Quinn said. "He knows now how foolish it is to remain stubborn when everything is going against him."

Ellen applied a handkerchief to the corner of her eyes while Dr. Dunbar glared.

"He hasn't a chance, has he, Mr. Quinn?" she said.

"Not a ghost of a chance," Quinn replied. "I'm sorry. . . ."

Butch was waiting when Quinn and Silk returned to the hotel. He had important news.

"I found out that this Bert Sinclair has been in the chips lately," he informed. "Not too much dough, you understand, but enough to buy booze with. Usually he mooched drinks. So I figured he must have pulled a job, and I learned he had been hanging around Pawn Shop Alley a week or so back. I went down there and talked to some of the hock shop dealers. Boy, does this badge of mine do tricks!"

"I think you'll be entitled to keep it," Quinn said. "Also an office in New York. It's a handy cover-up for your activities. But go ahead, Butch."

"Sinclair hocked several items. An onyx clock for one thing, some leather goods for another. An old watch-chain, a couple of good fountain pens. Most of the stuff has already been bought. And get this—by one man. The same guy in every case. He must have canvassed all the hock shops."

"You're getting better," Quinn encouraged, "but there is something else. I can tell by the gleam in your eyes."

BUTCH grinned broadly and took from his pocket a well-worn leather case with its corners done in solid gold. He handed this to Quinn.

"Tip it away from the light," he suggested. "You'll find some initials originally stamped on with gold but worn away. Sinclair hocked that, too."

"I see them," Quinn said softly. "J.B.—Jonathan Bolton. Butch, this man Sinclair burglarized J.B.'s home. He either saw something there or stole something which incriminates the killer."

"That's pretty good guessing." Butch beamed. "I went to J.B.'s house. It's been empty since they heaved him in the clink. I found where Sinclair had busted in. A cellar window. But I didn't find anything that might interest you."

"Of course you didn't, Butch. Sinclair pawned his stolen goods. The pawnshop dealer displayed them, and the murderer

recognized them as J.B.'s possessions so he went to J.B.'s house to check and saw what Sinclair must also have noticed. He reached Sinclair in time to stop him from talking, but not soon enough to keep him out of the case entirely."

"But if Sinclair knew, from what he observed at J.B.'s home, who the real guilty man is," Silk said, "why didn't he go to the police? It's dangerous for even a stool pigeon to sell information concerning a homicide."

Quinn was completely relaxed, like a man finally at the end of a long and difficult trail.

"What Sinclair saw had no evident connection with any murders," he said. "Silk, the Bolton Building is still open. I think you ought to go there and try to smuggle the Black Bat's outfit from the vault. I'm going to need it tonight."

Silk departed on his errand. Quinn began talking to Butch, giving him instructions in minute detail until the giant had absorbed them completely. By the time Silk returned, Butch had disappeared. Silk presented the Black Bat's regalia with a flourish.

"Wasn't even seen," he boasted. "Give me a few minutes to oil and reload your gun and we'll be off."

"We're calling on Dr. Dunbar," Quinn said. "But there is plenty of time. I'll take care of the gun. You find a drug store and bring me the three chemicals I've written on this list. Also an alcohol lamp and a couple of test tubes."

"Yes, sir." Silk looked puzzled. "Have you developed some sort of a clue?"

"It's a spoon, Silk. Just a plain sterling silver spoon which came out of Mrs. Ventres' home. If I'm correct in my surmise, it will help to pin a proper amount of guilt upon a murderer."

When Silk returned Quinn's experiments with the spoon and the chemicals were neither lengthy nor involved. He studied a black precipitate in the bottom of one test tube.

"Well, that does it, Silk," he said. "The poison which killed Mrs. Ventres reacts with silver. Though there was no

evidence of it, Mrs. Ventres measured out the dose of poison with this spoon. Later the murderer washed the spoon and put it away, but the chemical had already started to react."

Silk whistled. "Who ever heard of a suicide measuring out the lethal dose, sir?"

"That," Quinn said in a pleased voice, "is what I've been thinking. . . ."

It was Tony Quinn and his servant who left the hotel for a ride into the country night air. But it was the Black Bat who slipped from the car moments later and faded out of sight in the direction of Dr. Dunbar's rather modest dwelling.

Dr. Dunbar, at work in a corner of his living room which had been fitted up as a study, was bent over his small desk. The only illumination came from a desk lamp, so that most of the room was in shadow.

Dunbar never heard a sound until he half sensed the flitting shadow that passed along the wall beside him. He looked up, startled and wide-eyed. One hand darted toward the middle desk drawer, but he didn't open it and go for the gun he kept there.

He was able to distinguish the figure now and he quickly placed both hands on the surface of his desk in a token of surrender.

"The Black Bat!" he said, somewhat thickly.

"Good evening, Dr. Dunbar," the figure in black said amiably. "I'm sorry to slip up on you this way, but I really can't go around ringing front door bells. If I have your word not to make any trouble or try to call the police, I'll gladly put away this gun in my hand."

"Why should I—work against you—when you seem to be trying to help J.B.?" Dunbar asked nervously.

THE Black Bat slipped his automatic back into his holster, pulled a chair closer to the desk and sat down.

"Then I think I can trust you," he said. "It is true that I am trying to help

J.B., because I am convinced of his innocence. That is why I came here, to enlist your help."

"Anything I can do—" Dunbar said stiffly.

"I have reason to believe that one of J.B.'s alleged victims—Henry Ventres—had something on him. I've learned a letter was written, which has since vanished. A letter in which Ventres made certain threats. Now you have probably been closer to J.B. than anyone else ever has been. Do you know anything of this note?"

"I've never heard of it," Dunbar declared. "I doubt such a note exists. What in the world could Ventres have had on J.B.? Everyone in this town was eternally trying to pin something on him and never succeeded. J.B. has always been a careful man."

"A man slips now and then no matter how cautious he may be," the Black Bat said. "I'm sure this note does exist. A private detective, who is trying to help J.B. strictly on his own, also knows about the note. He tried to find it in J.B.'s office. Frankly, I went there for the same purpose. I'm inclined to believe that J.B. has a hiding place there. Or his most valued possessions, his secrets, may be in his safe."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the doctor.

"Nothing. J.B. trusted you completely. I believe if such a note was in existence, you'd know of it. Isn't that logical?"

Dunbar fiddled with a letter opener. "Yes, I think so. I am, perhaps, the only friend J.B. has, and a man must confide in someone. He has told me things which were highly confidential. I doubt he would have held back if Ventres had threatened him."

"The case is going badly, isn't it, Doctor?"

"Very badly. Mr. Quinn is one of the shrewdest and most relentless prosecutors I have ever seen in action."

"Do you believe J.B. murdered those two men?"

"No," Dunbar snapped. "I do not. He killed Ventres, but Ventres asked for it, and J.B. was within his legal rights in shooting him. But if this note you speak of does exist and is ever found, it would lend the finishing touch to J.B.'s guilt."

"The private detective is trying to find it and destroy it," said the Black Bat. "J.B. knows nothing about this man. He's on his own, hoping to claim a reward from J.B. if his work helps to prove J.B.'s innocence."

"I've wondered about him," Dunbar said. "But what have you accomplished? Is there any hope? Anything I might tell J.B. to give him back his courage?"

"Not yet, Doctor. If J.B. is convicted and sentenced, we still have time to work. Tell me, what do you think of Dennis Waring? Could he have framed J.B.? I know he needs money, and J.B.'s fortune would be at his disposal if the frame worked."

"I can't bring myself to believe that Dennis Waring is capable of such a thing," Dunbar said. He gestured slightly and smiled with one side of his mouth. "But then, I can't make myself believe anyone is really bad. When I begin thinking about who might have done this, I doubt every theory which comes into my mind. I'd make a poor detective."

The Black Bat laughed. "It's odd how you are so closely associated with J.B. whom everyone in this city detests. Because those same people probably like you more than they like anyone else here. The contrast is amazing."

Dunbar really smiled this time. "It's only a question of personality, Black Bat. J.B. was brought up to be on guard against people anxious to take his money away from him. His forefathers were exactly like him. So he became a suspicious, growling sort, trusting few people and intent only upon running his enterprises in the most profitable way. He isn't cruel or mean. Brusque, perhaps, and definitely a cold type, but he likes people as much as I do. Though he has never dared show this."

"The man could do much good, if he'd only change," the Black Bat said, and arose. "Perhaps, after being in the shadow of death so long, he has changed. I'll do my best to help him. I may need your assistance. And be careful of Tony Quinn."

Dunbar arose also, and extended his hand across the desk.

"Quinn worries me," he admitted. "He's one of the few men I'm afraid of. He doesn't allow sentiment to interfere with his work, and his relentlessness is really astonishing. But even Quinn has limitations. With you working on our side I feel better . . . Oh yes, one more thing. There is a man named Markey—a professional gambler and crook. He once threatened to get even with J.B. if it took a lifetime. If this is a frame-up, it's being handled by someone who is a master of the art. Markey fills that bill."

"I'll look into it," the Black Bat promised. "And I'll see you again, Doctor."

Dunbar watched the figure in black retreat swiftly until the shadows swallowed him up. There were no sounds of a door or window opening, nothing but an intense silence. Dr. Dunbar shivered.

CHAPTER XV

Without Proof



FOR A full hour Dr. Dunbar waited before he opened the desk drawer and removed a small but highly efficient automatic. He pulled up one trouser leg and slipped the gun into his sock. It lodged there securely. Then he hurried to the hall, opened a closet door, and donned hat and topcoat.

He got his car out and drove downtown, to park within a block of the tall building where Jonathan Bolton maintained his offices. Dunbar had a key to

the front door and didn't have to call the watchman. He went to the elevators, hesitated, then proceeded to walk up seventeen flights. The whirring of the elevator mechanism, he guessed, might be heard in the basement where the watchman would now be having his midnight lunch.

Dunbar sat down on the last landing to let his heart stop pumping, and to recover his breath. Then he got up and went to J.B.'s office door. He listened outside for a moment, hesitated again, and finally went down the hall to the door of the private office where Atkinson had been found dead.

Another key opened that door. He stepped in, closed the door, and made certain the snap lock fell into place. Then he walked through the darkness with the unerring steps of someone familiar with the premises. He passed through the door leading into J.B.'s office, took a lighter from his pocket and snapped it on.

He held the lighter close to the vault combination and unerringly opened the safe. He swung the heavy door back, stepped inside the strong room and snapped on the swinging overhead bulb. Then he began searching the contents of the safe. He was well-provided with keys and opened the fireproof boxes one at a time.

He was careful not to upset the papers inside them, but soon found the letter which Ventres had written. He read this, and smiled somewhat grimly. When everything was replaced, with the exception of the letter, he left the vault and closed the door. After spinning the combination he carefully wiped every part of the safe surface on which his fingerprints might have been left.

Next he went out to the office where J.B.'s private secretary worked. He sat down at her desk, looked for a plain envelope and addressed it to "Anthony Quinn, Courthouse," on the secretary's typewriter. He spread Ventres' note on the desk and wiped it energetically. Still using his pocket handkerchief, he folded

the note and thrust it into the envelope. He sealed it, searched for stamps, and affixed one.

All this had been accomplished with only the illumination from his pocket lighter. He extinguished it, arose, and held the envelope in his handkerchief. He started toward the door.

What happened then occurred so quickly that Dunbar was hardly aware that the envelope had been snatched from his hand. He spun around, trying to penetrate the gloom.

"You exhibit your friendship for J.B. in a strange manner." The Black Bat's calm voice made the doctor shudder again. "You were after this note the night you saw me in this building, but you decided my capture was far more important, at the moment, than finding this letter. So you called the police."

"What sort of a trick is this?" Dunbar demanded.

"It is a trick," the Black Bat admitted. "I purposely let you know that I was aware this note existed and might be dangerous to J.B. I was quite certain you'd come here at once and get it before I beat you to it."

Dunbar had recovered his customary aplomb. "Are you insinuating that I want J.B. executed?"

"I'm directly accusing you of framing him," the Black Bat said. "Incidentally, I'm aiming a gun in your direction, and I'd enjoy putting a bullet through you, so no tricks. In fact, you'd better raise yours hands and submit to a search."

"I've nothing to fear from you or anyone else," Dunbar growled. "Go ahead and search."

The Black Bat frisked him almost casually, making no attempt to check on an ankle gun. Then he forced Dunbar back into J.B.'s private office and to one of the chairs against the wall.

"You had a key to the door of the next office," the Black Bat said. "The murderer of Atkinson must have had such a key too. Of course you knew what Atkinson was endeavoring to do—ruin J.B. I suspect you helped him. You knew J.B.'s

temper, and what would probably happen. When Atkinson left and passed through the adjoining office, you killed him. He put up no fight, so he must have been killed by someone he trusted."

DUNBAR crossed his legs. He felt reasonably secure there in the inky darkness and the gun in his sock had a comforting weight.

"I'm afraid you've made a rather horrible mistake, Black Bat," he said.

"There is no mistake." The voice was cold and bitter. "You have the blood of four people on your hands, Doctor. J.B. reacted to finding Atkinson's body even better than you'd hoped for. He did not report the murder. You guessed he would first endeavor to regain the controlling stock which Atkinson had negotiated for. Then you scared J.B. into near panic by firing at him, by trying to force his car into an accident, and finally by throwing a knife at him. All matters which J.B. would have a difficult time proving or even making people believe."

"You sent Ventres to J.B.'s home. Ventres trusted you—just as everyone else in this town trusts you. It was well-arranged that J.B. would be in the house, though Ventres had been told he would not be there. Ventres was a cowardly sort. He didn't find what he went after—the documents J.B. was holding over his head—and he was afraid of what J.B. would do to him if he were caught. That's why Ventres didn't stop. And J.B., high-strung and frightened, shot him just as you knew he would."

"Only a man well versed in psychology could have arranged such a trap. A doctor knows the subject well, and you are a doctor. From the first I suspected you for that reason. But Mrs. Ventres knew all the details. You managed to keep her quiet until I questioned her. Then she became alarmed and went to you for advice."

"Can you prove all this, Black Bat?" Dunbar hitched his leg a little higher.

"Unfortunately, I can't. There is little proof of anything, Doctor. But getting

back to Mrs. Ventres, you told her not to talk. You convinced her, also, that she wasn't well and you kindly provided her with a bottle of medicine. A cure-all, for after she measured out a spoonful of it in a wine glass and took it, her ills were over, because she was dead. I found the spoon she used and which you removed and replaced among the other silver. A suicide doesn't measure out the deadly potion, so I knew it was murder. Placing her husband's portrait in her lap was clever. It fooled the police."

"Proof!" Dunbar said acidly. "Give me proof."

"I have a little. When Mrs. Ventres drove to your home, everyone else connected with the case was accounted for. Dennis Waring and his wife were with Lieutenant Johnson, who also needed an alibi. Markey, the gambler, was at his place miles away. You, alone, could have seen her and murdered her and set a trap for me. Because you knew I was coming back. Mrs. Ventres told you so."

"I got out of that one, but so did you. But as always, in carefully planned crimes, the unexpected shows itself. In this case it arose in the form of Bert Sinclair, a petty thief and informer. Knowing the Bolton house was locked up, he broke in and stole a few things which were hard to trace. He pawned them. The articles were put up for sale because the pawnbrokers knew Sinclair would never reclaim them. You saw the articles, went to Bolton's house and convinced yourself it had been burglarized."

Dunbar laughed. His right hand grasped his ankle. He could draw that gun any time. Also his eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. He could see the outlines of the Black Bat, and knew that the hooded man's gun was carelessly slanted downward.

"So, because Bolton's home was burglarized, I killed the burglar," Dunbar said. "It doesn't make sense."

"When you have the facts, it does," the Black Bat said. "Sinclair happened to prowl J.B.'s desk and found certain facts which would upset your plans. Sin-

clair tried to sell them. You discovered who he was when you bought the articles he stole and pawned. You murdered him."

Dunbar loosened the little gun slightly. "I'd be interested to know why I'm supposed to have done all this," he said. "Of course J.B. will leave me a considerable sum of money, but I'm not poor. I don't need it, and I'd hardly murder for it."

"The motive behind this case was elusive," the Black Bat said. "In fact, it hardly seemed to exist—until I learned about a mystery man named John Strange. Ah—I heard that intake of breath. You're surprised that I did find the right track. Jonathan Bolton is John Strange. Again psychology enters this affair. J.B., proud, haughty, apparently disdainful of his fellowmen, is really as human as anyone. But his pride refused to permit him to show it. So he became an anonymous benefactor. He gave this city the equivalent of millions."

DUNBAR gave a sneering laugh.

"Suppose I admit it," he said. "How does Bolton's philanthropies constitute a motive for me to frame him?"

"Because J.B. was so careful not to be associated with this John Strange that he commissioned you to act for him. You did, taking good care that the financial firm which handled the details knew your identity and, if questioned, would honestly believe you had donated this money yourself. Why? Because when the identity of John Strange became known to the citizens of this city, he would be honored and respected as he deserved to be."

"You wanted that honor and respect. You indicated you had money. I don't believe you ever had much. You'd claim you broke yourself doing all this good and the citizens' respect would grow even greater. In a way, you're as strange a person as J.B. You like to be a big shot. You go out of your way to show how kindly, benevolent and human you are. But you're a cold-blooded killer."

Dunbar laughed again. "Do you think you could make a jury believe this?"

"I do not. Any more than I can make them believe you have always resented J.B.'s money and power. You have hated him because he took you in hand and made you his one friend when you might have gained glory as a practicing physician. You couldn't buck him, because J.B. wouldn't stand for any opposition to his wishes. So gradually you came to hate him and, by taking over the mantle of his weird John Strange, you saw a way to become the biggest man in this city."

"And what do you propose to do about this?" Dunbar asked.

"Unfortunately, I can do nothing. J.B. doesn't suspect you, and he'll cling to covering up the true identity of John Strange right to the end. You are a murderer I cannot act against, Doctor. For one of the few times in my life I admit to being beaten. J.B. will stand convicted and be sent to the chair. I'll be working, trying to prove your guilt. I will, somehow."

Dunbar had the tiny gun in his hand. "I've been thinking," he said casually, "that I happened to be passing this building and I saw you enter. I followed you. You threatened me, and I was forced to kill you. They'd pin a medal on me for that."

The Black Bat never moved. "One thing you don't know about me, Doctor. I can see in the dark. I watched you go for that small gun. I know it is aimed at me. You can pull the trigger if you like, but I doubt I shall die from such a small bullet before I can pump you full of heavy slugs. Perhaps that is the way out. Perhaps I should administer the justice you deserve."

Dunbar gasped. He quickly raised the gun. The Black Bat's automatic roared once. Dunbar's right hand seemed to explode. He screamed, doubled up, and screamed again. He wound a handkerchief around the wounded hand and backed into a corner. He begged for his life, pleaded for mercy—and then

realized that he was talking to an empty room.

He picked up his shattered gun, crept out of the building and went home. Self-assurance returned. He was safe. The Black Bat couldn't appear against him, and no one else knew the true facts. The Black Bat had no proof at all. Things were exactly as they had been, and time was on Dunbar's side. Given enough time he could get rid of the Black Bat somehow.

He poured himself a drink and then attended to his wounded hand.

CHAPTER XVI

Forced Confession



NEXT morning Dr. Dunbar accompanied Ellen and Dennis Waring into court as he had previously. He had lost all his terror. Daylight was the Black Bat's deadliest enemy. He would never appear here, and even if he did, they would laugh off

his accusations.

J. B. was brought in. He had aged ten years overnight.

Tony Quinn was at his table with Silk beside him. J. B. looked over at his daughter, and attempted a wan smile. All that belligerence was gone. He was just an old man, desperately afraid.

Court began and Quinn resumed his prosecution. But this morning Loomis, the defense attorney, seemed more cheerful. Quinn finally rested his case. Loomis arose and asked that Mr. O'Leary be called to the stand.

Butch came from the rear of the room, with never a glance at Quinn. He was sworn, took the stand and identified himself as a licensed private detective. He told how he had entered the case hoping to aid J. B. and be rewarded.

Under Loomis' urging he told his story.

"When I arrived in town, I was beaten up and warned to get out. By some hoodlums who didn't want anyone working on Mr. Bolton's side. But I don't scare. I came back. I prowled around and learned a few things. Like a stool pigeon named Sinclair had busted into the Bolton house and hocked the stuff he swiped. Like a certain man had bought all these things because he didn't want Sinclair suspected of even having been in Bolton's home. Then he killed Sinclair."

"Object!" Tony Quinn shouted.

The objection was sustained. Butch gave him a baleful glance and went on while Dr. Dunbar began to fidget nervously. Butch told how one man had retrieved all the articles Sinclair had stolen, and that the pawnbrokers could identify him. Then Butch suddenly switched to a new tack.

"I also found out that Dr. Dunbar is the guy everybody calls John Strange. The guy who hands out all that money."

The effect on the crowded courtroom was astonishing. J. B.'s conviction couldn't have created more excitement. When it died down some, Butch went on:

"I can prove Dr. Dunbar is John Strange. He handled all the details."

"What has Dr. Dunbar and John Strange to do with the case of murder against Jonathan Bolton?" Quinn shouted. "I ask the court to restrain this witness!"

Suddenly Jonathan Bolton was on his feet. "Your Honor, I want to be heard. I will be heard! Dunbar is not John Strange. If he has arranged things to show he is, then it is because he is seeking the glory which I shunned. Because I am John Strange. I never meant it to come out. Not even if I was sent to the electric chair. People will say I'm trying to buy my way into their good graces. They'll say I'm using my money again, to make a good fellow of myself. I couldn't stand that. I'm peculiar, I know. I can't meet people as people. I've always been thought of as a money-

bag and the power behind this city. I hated it. I wanted to have people like me."

Quinn was waving his hands and shouting J.B. down. The judge snapped an order for Quinn to resume his chair.

"This may have some bearing," the judge said. "I know it's unusual, but go ahead, Mr. Bolton."

J. B. wiped his face. "I instructed Dr. Dunbar to handle the identity of John Strange. I provided the money and planned the charities. Now it seems he wants the credit, and I'm beginning to think he is behind this whole thing. Dunbar has always been broke, dependent upon me. I've been generous with him, but while I don't care for any glory myself, I don't want him to take credit for the millions spent here!"

Dunbar was on his feet, red-faced, sweating, and protesting loudly. Two court attendants forced him to sit down. J. B. was holding onto the back of his chair with both hands. His eyes flamed with his old spirit.

Butch began talking again. "Dr. Dunbar killed Mrs. Ventres," he said. "He gave her poison and told her it was medicine. He's got a bottle of the same stuff in his home, and you can't buy it any place unless you're a doctor."

"That's a lie!" Dunbar screamed. "You can search my house. I do not have any poison."

"She went to see you that night," Butch said. "I was trailing her."

"She came to me about something else!" Dunbar shouted and then let out a screech.

HE jumped up, fought his way to the aisle, and started running. Lieutenant Johnson used a sap with considerable effectiveness.

When the excitement died away and the courtroom was finally cleared of spectators too excited to behave, Tony Quinn made a formal statement to the court.

"Due to developments, Your Honor, the State asks that the case against

Jonathan Bolton be postponed until all facts have been investigated. Dr. Dunbar has given rather violent proof of his guilt, and in my opinion Jonathan Bolton is not only an innocent man but a man wrongfully judged by this entire city all his lifetime. The evidence presented for the defense was hardly legal, yet it is effective. I believe Dr. Dunbar is so upset that he may confess."

A baliff stepped onto the bench and whispered in the judge's ear. The judge smiled. "Mr. Quinn," he said, "Dr. Dunbar *has* confessed. He's completely broken. Have you anything to say with further reference to Jonathan Bolton?"

Quinn spoke in a ringing voice. "The State withdraws its action against the defendant, Your Honor, and makes a public apology."

He whispered to Silk, who led him over to where Jonathan Bolton stood, still bewildered by this sudden turn of events. Quinn put out his hand and Bolton took it warmly.

"You only did what your job called for," Bolton said. Then he leaned closer and whispered, "I don't know what has happened, but I've a feeling you sensed it all along. I've an idea you were behind proving my innocence. I'd almost be willing to claim that you are the Black Bat."

"Please don't make such claims out loud." Quinn smiled. "They'd be most embarrassing. And forgive the theatricals. Dr. Dunbar had to be forced to become as frightened as you were when you shot Ventres. An act you will not be prosecuted for. But Dunbar, being so upset, did crack. Of course I had nothing to do with that. I'm only assuming what happened. And when that private detective made you stand up and say you were John Strange, Dunbar's whole motive was gone. He was a man who had murdered, and the gain he expected to derive had been snatched away from him."

"For a man who knows so little, your assumptions are pretty good," Bolton

said, and grinned. "And it wasn't the private detective who made me declare myself. It was you—what you told me yesterday. To stand up and fight. That's what I did, and I think you were preparing me for the moment when Dunbar's plans would be revealed. I might have let it go, the way I was feeling. But you changed that."

Silk broke in. "Mr. Bolton, your daughter is waiting."

"And that fool kid she married," Bolton said happily. "Sticking by me after what I did to him."

SILK led Quinn out to where their car was parked. They drove into the country where the sun was bright and the air clean. Quinn smoked his pipe.

"It's the first time," he said, "that I ever deliberately lost a case, and I had more trouble losing it than winning it."

He took a sealed envelope from his pocket, lighted a match to the envelope.

"This is a note Ventres wrote to J. B.," he said. "A vague note which would have crucified J. B. Ventres discovered he was John Strange and threatened to reveal it. J. B. didn't want that to happen. His old pride. Thank heaven he's lost it. But when I told Dr. Dunbar about the note and Dunbar went after it, addressed it to me for use against J. B., then I knew he was our man."

"Yes, I know." Silk was looking straight ahead. "I also know why you kept it. If there was no other way to prove Dunbar's guilt and J.B.'s innocence, you intended to reveal the fact that you are the Black Bat and you'd have somehow proved what Dunbar meant to do with this note."

Quinn threw the burning envelope onto the side of the road.

"One thing I like about you, Silk, is your utter lack of tact sometimes. Saying I would have jeopardized my own life to save J. B.'s."

"Would you, sir?"

Quinn stared moodily at the highway.

"I wonder," he said softly. "Yes, I think I might have."

The Man Who Broke

While the prisoner at Devil's Island waited, and all France buzzed with scandal and intrigue, a keen-eyed investigator studied a scrap of paper!

THE GUARD spoke in a harsh indiffer-ent voice.

"Here's mail for you, Dreyfus," he said to the convict.

Gaunt and haggard, his face lined with suffering and his hair prematurely gray, the convict rose from the table at which he had been seated. He stumbled feverishly to the door of his tiny stone hut, blinked a moment in the pitiless glare of the sun on the island rock. Then he extended a wasted arm, croaked:

"Mail? I live only for that word. Give it to me."

His hands trembled as he tore open the envelope. He peered at the two childish scrawls on the plain sheet of paper and tears misted his eyes.

October 10, 1896

Papa Cheri,

I want you to come back soon. You must ask God. I ask him every day.

Je t'embrasse beaucoup, beaucoup.

Ta petite Jeanne

And the other:

Papa Cheri,

I cried this morning, because you do not come back, and that makes me very sad. I want to say something that will please you;



*Another in a
Series
of Amazing
Revelations
from the
Annals of
Dave
Carvalho,
World's
Greatest
Handwriting
Expert!*

the DREYFUS CASE

I am very good, and Mama told me she was pleased.

Je t'embrasse beaucoup.

Pierrot

Albert Dreyfus, formerly a captain in the French Army, now prisoner for life on dreaded Devil's Island, bowed his head and wept. From his lips burst a cry of anguish.

"Who will deliver me from this hell! Who will restore my honor as a French officer! Who will open their eyes to this crime!"

Destiny Works for Dreyfus

Yet even as Dreyfus cried aloud his despair to the unheeding sea and land, something happened in far-off New York that was eventually to bring him salvation.

David N. Carvalho, world's foremost handwriting expert, was strolling down Fifth Avenue. Clutching his hand was his small daughter. It was her birthday, and her distinguished-looking father had promised her a treat. Only for occasions like this would Carvalho tear himself away from his private laboratory with its instruments of detection.

Already, with an infallibility that had astonished the law-enforcement officers of the world, Carvalho had solved dozens of forgeries, will cases and murders that had baffled them completely. Scotland Yard, the French Suretè and district attorneys in America alike called on the talents of this wizard with the written word. Member of a famous Portuguese-Jewish family that had come to America in its early days to escape religious persecution, David Carvalho devoted himself wholly to the detection of crime and the solution of mysteries. The scrawl of a pen across paper was to him like the sniff of a bloody track to a coursing hound.

Just at the moment, however, the tall, handsome man with cropped beard and mustache was sniffing only the rare sun-



DAVID N. CARVALHO

shine of a New York winter's day. He had purchased his small daughter some pretty clothes and now it was time to eat.

They entered a famous French restaurant. The headwaiter knew Carvalho well and bowed them to a special table. The garçon took their order with a grave intentness; then offered Carvalho a French newspaper to read until the special dishes were prepared.

Carvalho Scents a Case

Carvalho unfolded the sheets, smiled at his little daughter. "My dear, let me see how your French is progressing. Suppose you read the main article."

She took it up with a doubtful air, screwed up her nose at it. "I'm sorry, Daddy, but it seems to be all in handwriting. I can't make it out."

"In handwriting, Claire? You must be mistaken? You mean *print*." He took

A True Story by ROBERT WALLACE

the paper from her hands, glanced at the front page, first with a casual air, then with swift attention. His eyes glowed, he read on and on. His sniff now was definitely that of the bloodhound.

The waiter brought the expensive food with careful hands. Carvalho ignored the dishes. His daughter squirmed.

"Daddy, everything'll get cold!"

But he didn't hear. Suddenly, he sprang from his chair, folded the newspaper into his pocket.

"We're leaving, Claire. Come!"

"But the food!" she wailed.

He stared at the shining spread a moment, took out a bill, flung it on the table. "Some other time, dear," he said. "I have work to do."

That night David N. Carvalho, world's foremost handwriting expert, wrote a letter to Madame Dreyfus in Paris that was to change the course of history.

Evidence of Treason

The Dreyfus affair had rocked all France. Its future course was to rock the world. In September, 1894, Major Henry, a member of the Counter-Espionage section of the French army, had found on his desk the scraps of a letter which one of his secret agents had fished out of the wastebasket of the German military attaché to France. After piecing them together, he stared at the letter in consternation.

It was an offer by a French officer to sell his country's military secrets to the Germans. His consternation deepened when he recognized the handwriting. It was that of his close friend and associate, Major Esterhazy!

Henry's first reaction was to destroy the bordereau. His own career, involved as it was with Esterhazy's, was in jeopardy. But no, the secret agent would talk. He must turn it in. Yet at all costs he must keep silent about his knowledge of the handwriting; find, if possible, some scapegoat on whom to pin the incriminating document.

It proved easier than he thought. The top officers of the General Staff, to whom he submitted the treasonable bordereau, knew that only an officer attached to their staff could be in a position to supply the information which the letter

listed. Therefore they were all in a spot. They had to cover themselves and their friends. In their inverted scale of values their careers came first, the army second, their country third; while justice—if they considered such a silly thing at all—trailed a hopeless last.

They Select a Scapegoat

They went down the list of officers of the General Staff. They came to Esterhazy's name—and passed it by. Esterhazy was well-connected socially. He was their own kind. Of course, he couldn't be suspected! Then they came to Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Aha! They stopped, nodded to one another.

To be sure, Dreyfus was an excellent officer, with an unblemished record of service to his country. But—he was Jewish! That was enough for these brass hats who considered the French army a private preserve of their own. They could even detect, so they murmured, a similarity in Dreyfus's handwriting to that of the bordereau.

Dreyfus was summoned to the Ministry of War. Major du Paty de Clam, one of the clique, was there alone. His arm was in a sling.

"Captain Dreyfus," he said, "the General will be here shortly. I have to get out an important letter for him. As you can see, I hurt my arm. Do you mind writing it for me?"

"Why, certainly, Major." Dreyfus sat himself at the desk.

Du Paty began to dictate. It was the text of the bordereau!

Narrowly he watched the unsuspecting Captain. Dreyfus kept on writing. Suddenly Du Paty stopped, cried out:

"Why, you're trembling, Captain!"

Dreyfus looked up in surprise. "Not at all. What do you mean?"

But Du Paty had already ripped off the pretended sling, rushed to the door, opened it. Three men entered. Dramatically he pointed at Dreyfus.

"Arrest that man! I accuse him of high treason!"

Dreyfus was tried before a secret court martial. Tremendous pressure was put on his military judges by the General Staff. The Minister of War swore to Dreyfus's guilt, even though he sus-

pected his innocence. Still his judges hesitated; the evidence was very flimsy. It was Henry who saved the day for the prosecution. Dramatically he rose in the courtroom.

"I have been told by a personage of the highest integrity that there is a traitor attached to the General Staff." He pointed to the crucifix on the wall. "I swear by all that is holy that this person named Dreyfus is the traitor."

Dreyfus bounded to his feet. "I demand to know the name of this person. Let him confront me."

Henry smiled and touched his cap. "His name is a military secret."

The military judges were impressed. Dreyfus was condemned to life imprisonment on Devil's Island.

They Degrade the Victim

The hour of degradation came. Four soldiers escorted Dreyfus to the parade ground of the Ecole Militaire where detachments from all the regiments were drawn up in the huge square. Nine o'clock struck. A general, mounted on his white charger, raised his sword aloft. The drums rolled out and the bugles rang out. Dreyfus halted before the general, pale, with head erect. In a loud voice the general spoke.

"Alfred Dreyfus, you are unworthy to bear arms. In the name of the French people we here degrade you."

Dreyfus, raising his arms aloft, cried, "Soldiers, I am innocent! It is an innocent man who is being dishonored! Vive la France! Vive l'armee!"

A sergeant went up to Dreyfus. With rapid gestures he tore the gold stripes and buttons from his jacket. Then, taking Dreyfus's sword, he broke it across his knee. The condemned man looked at the shattered pieces at his feet.

"I am innocent," he cried. "You are degrading an innocent man."

But the mob outside the parade grounds, who had been fed with lies by an inflammatory press, shook their fists and shouted:

"A mort! a mort! Kill him! Kill him!"

Henry and the General Staff were content. Dreyfus had been sent to a pest-hole from which none returned. The case was closed. Their careers were safe.

Unfortunately for them, they reckoned without David N. Carvalho.

Handwritings Not the Same

It was two years later that the French newspaper, *Le Matin*, published for the first time a facsimile of the bordereau that had sent Dreyfus to Devil's Island. By a stroke of fate it was this very issue that Carvalho read in the French restaurant in New York.

Along with everyone else Carvalho had followed the Dreyfus affair with considerable interest. The world had resounded with it. Specimens of the unfortunate man's handwriting had been reproduced in the newspapers on many occasions. But never before had the actual handwriting of the bordereau itself been reproduced!

In that restaurant on Fifth Avenue, Carvalho's expert eye had immediately seen points of difference between Dreyfus' handwriting and the bordereau—points that no other eye in the world had detected. When, back home, he checked more carefully with enlargements, lenses and measuring devices, he was certain of his first suspicion. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, ruined, dishonored, prisoner for life on Devil's Island, had not written the treasonable bordereau!

Then he sat down and rushed off a letter to Madame Dreyfus.

Wife Sends Agent

Several months later a young Frenchman was ushered into the high-ceiled library of David N. Carvalho. Under his arm bulged a leather portfolio. He bowed in courtly fashion.

"Monsieur Carvalho," he said, "I am the emissary of Madame Dreyfus. She was overjoyed to receive your kind offer of aid." His expression clouded. "You are our only hope. Without you Captain Dreyfus is lost."

"That remains to be seen," declared Carvalho. "Tell me, sir, what is the present status of the case?"

"Ah, monsieur, France is bitterly divided. Dreyfus has become a symbol of France's desperate division. The royalists, the reactionaries, the anti-Semites—all who hate the Republic—

are against Dreyfus."

"And those for Dreyfus?" inquired Carvalho. "Who are they?"

"Everyone who took the trouble to study the facts. All the liberals, the great writers and intellectuals. Even Major Picquart, former Chief of French Intelligence. Because he was an honest man and had the courage to say he thought the case was a frameup, he was demoted and shifted to a hole in the wall."

Carvalho leaned far back, his eyes narrowed. He seemed to be studying a spot on the ceiling.

"Has there been any expert opinion on the handwriting of the bordereau or has it all been the guesswork of amateurs?"

Five Different Styles

The Frenchman's face grew troubled.

"Bertillon, the French fingerprint expert, testified for the General Staff. He came into court with an armful of charts and diagrams that no one could understand. One chart was a drawing of a fortress. He said it showed how Dreyfus had fortified the bordereau against five attacks, three from the left, two from the right. He claimed Dreyfus had used five different styles in handwriting in the bordereau to protect himself and that accounted for the dissimilarities with his own handwriting. He shouted words like 'reticulation', 'gabarit', 'imbrication.' No one could understand a word of all that gibberish. Some thought he was crazy. Others were impressed precisely because they couldn't understand a single word."

Carvalho smiled. "And the judges," he asked quietly, "what did they think of this—this Bertillon?"

The Frenchman shrugged.

Judges Were Confused

"The judges were military men—generals. They knew what was expected of them. Bertillon was famous. He was an expert. What did it matter to them that he was a fingerprint, not a handwriting expert." He laughed bitterly. "They couldn't understand his report; but that was all the more reason it must be right."

Carvalho rose from his chair.

"Tell Madame Dreyfus," he declared, "that ever since I saw a copy of the bordereau in *Le Matin*, I was convinced of her husband's innocence. What you tell me, makes me doubly sure. But we must have proofs. For this, time will be needed. Every word, every letter of these documents must be checked, analyzed. Tell Madame Dreyfus to have a little more patience. I promise you," he concluded, "when I have finished with Monsieur Bertillon, he will be very sorry he ever left the field of fingerprinting."

Carvalho's Analysis Arrives

A few months later a neatly wrapped folder was delivered to Madame Dreyfus. With unsteady hands, she opened it. It was Carvalho's detailed analysis of Captain Dreyfus's handwriting. Here, beyond a shadow of a doubt, were the proofs of his innocence. Here was David N. Carvalho's sworn deposition that Dreyfus could not have been the author of the bordereau.

But the path to justice was still a thorny one. In order to strengthen the case against Dreyfus, Henry had forged several documents for use as evidence against him. And members of the General Staff, including the Minister of War, had testified to their genuineness. If they should now reopen the case they would prove themselves forgers and liars. Therefore they turned a deaf ear to all pleas; they refused even to examine Carvalho's deposition.

Banker Spots Real Traitor

The weak point in Madame Dreyfus's plea for a new trial had been, that though she had evidence of her husband's innocence, she didn't know the name of the actual traitor. But once again fate intervened on the side of justice.

In November 1897, a leaflet reproduction of the bordereau came into the hands of Major Esterhazy's banker. Grabbing his hat he ran to see Mathieu Dreyfus, the prisoner's brother.

"No question about it," declared the banker, "the handwriting is Esterhazy's. I'd recognize that scrawl anywhere."

Overjoyed, Mathieu Dreyfus dashed off an open letter to the Minister of War denouncing Esterhazy and demanding

his trial. Prominent statesmen, writers and intellectuals took up the cry. The tide was beginning to turn.

Reluctantly the General Staff was forced to try Esterhazy, but the court martial was a miserable farce. The judges were secretly ordered to acquit him.

Zola Fights for Dreyfus

But truth, as Emile Zola, the great French writer, remarked, was on the march. After reading Carvalho's deposition and examining all the evidence, Zola wrote his famous "J'Accuse", a scathing denunciation of the General Staff and the clique of plotters and cowards who surrounded it.

"I accuse," he wrote, "the first court martial 'Dreyfus' of having violated the law in condemning an accused person on a document kept secret."

"I accuse the second court martial 'Esterhazy' of having, in obedience to orders, covered the illegality by committing, in its turn, that which is a crime, knowingly acquitting a guilty person."

All France was now aroused. Events moved swiftly. In the summer of 1898, Henry's forgery of an important document was uncovered. He confessed, and, when arrested, committed suicide. The Minister of War, the Chief of Staff, and several generals, resigned. Esterhazy, knowing that the jig was up, fled to England and there admitted his treason.

Victim Is Brought Back

Then, on a stormy night in July 1899, a white-haired emaciated exile landed in France. Surrounded by infantry with fixed bayonets, he was escorted to the military prison at Rennes to await retrial. Madame Dreyfus was there. They had been separated four years by the calendar but in that time Dreyfus, born thirty-nine years before, had become an old man. This retrial was also a court martial.

Here another farce was played out. Bertillon, with his reputation at stake in the face of Esterhazy and Henry's confessions, and Carvalho's deposition, screamed like a maniac.

"*Reticulation, imbrication, gabarit.*" He filled the courtroom with weird phrases and stories of fantastic plots. But this time the judges were not impressed. David N. Carvalho's deposition, sound, logical, simple, was more eloquent than Bertillon's loudest shouts.

Two of the seven officer-judges voted to acquit Dreyfus. Five voted to save the faces of their superiors and against their own judgment. The verdict spoke of extenuating circumstances and asked for a ten-year sentence instead of life. A few days later, Dreyfus was pardoned "in principle" by the Council of Ministers.

Though free, the shadow of guilt still rested on Dreyfus and he exerted all his energies to obtain a retrial and exoneration.

The Final Triumph

At last, in 1906, came the final triumph: the highest court of the French Republic re-examined the whole case. In a unanimous verdict they set aside the two convictions of Dreyfus and declared him completely innocent of all charges.

One week later, Captain Dreyfus, once more in uniform, but now white-haired, was marched into the same quadrangle of the Ecole Militaire, where, twelve years before, his epaulets had been torn off and his sword broken. Only this time the troops passed in dress review before him in the warm sunlight. Then, to the blare of trumpets and the long roll of drums, a high official of the French Republic advanced to Dreyfus and said in solemn tones:

"In the name of the President of the Republic, Major Dreyfus, I create you a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor." Three times he touched Dreyfus on the shoulder with his sword, then he pinned the Legion cross on his jacket and embraced him. A crowd, this time of friends and admirers, cheered.

"Long live Dreyfus!" they shouted.

"No," said Major Dreyfus. "Long live the Republic, long live the truth."

Across the Atlantic, three thousand miles away, David N. Carvalho smiled as he read the news.

"But how could you have been sure that the writing on the bordereau was not that of Dreyfus?" Carvalho was asked. "After all, there was some similarity."

Carvalho Explains Forgery

Carvalho's dark eyes twinkled.

"Suppose," he replied, "you saw a lame man limping down the street. He limps because he can walk in no other fashion. Behind him, a healthy youngster is imitating him by walking with an exaggerated limp. It would be apparent at once that the really lame man could not limp in such an exaggerated fashion. So it was with Dreyfus."

"I don't get it," retorted the questioner.

"It's simple. A particular feature of

Dreyfus' writing is that while all his initial letters start at the base line, sometimes the second to the fourth letter lift suddenly above the line. Then the rest of the word drops back to the base."

Carvalho laughed. "Esterhazy noticed that peculiarity, and imitated it. But he overdid it, as most forgers usually do. He exaggerated the limp of the lame man, so to speak. Whereas, in the real writing of Dreyfus, this peculiarity occurs in about three out of five words, in the bordereau it occurred every time. That licked Esterhazy."

A reminiscent look came upon David N. Carvalho's face. "There's an old Jewish saying that my beloved father used to quote. 'Do not try to be too perfect. Perfection lies only with Jehovah, our Lord!'"



Death Plays Politics!

VICTOR DERMOT, an honored and scrupulously honest man, was the last person anyone would expect to be mixed up in any shady deals—and yet some dark secret in his past must have been responsible for his sudden murder. The killer, soon captured, gloated over his deed. As he told Tony Quinn: "I pulled the trigger—and thirty-one other fingers were on it, too!"

Since Dermot was a dominant political figure, his demise called for the most thorough investigation. There was more than a hint that the trail would lead to some very important higher-ups . . . and crack a scandal wide open. . . .

Follow the Black Bat as he gambles with death to uncover the strange mystery of the "thirty-one trigger fingers" in one of the most difficult and dangerous cases he's ever tackled—

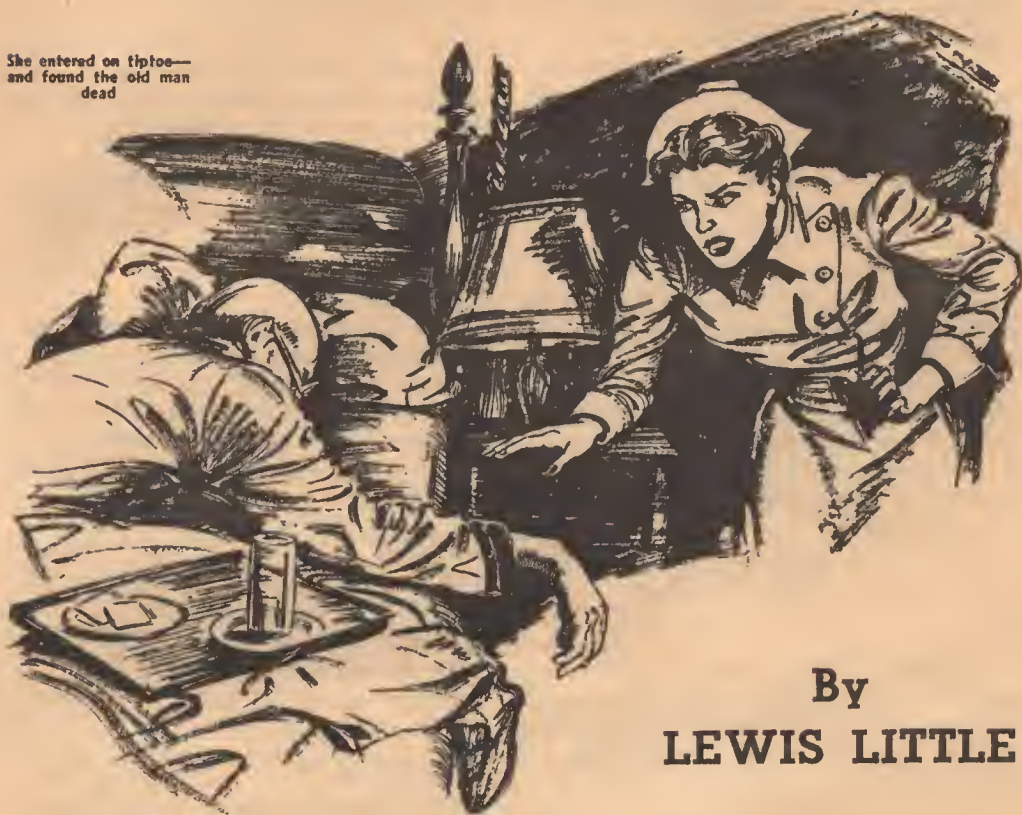
THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Next Issue's Featured Complete Tony Quinn Mystery!

The Invisible Hand

She entered on tiptoe—
and found the old man
dead



By
LEWIS LITTLE

YOKUM Acres stood on a bluff overlooking the Housatonic, about twenty-five miles from Hartford. It was a lovely, rambling old place full of four-poster beds, Italian antiques, Chinese cabinets and rich Persian rugs.

In winter, high snows drifted in over the estate, blocking its private roads, and all but marooning the people who lived at the Manor House, with only a large food locker and their own neuroses to keep them company.

Perhaps the most neurotic of them all, this chill January day, was old Maurice

Mitchell, who owned the estate, the beds, the Chinese cabinets, the plushy rugs and even the refrigerated beef.

Mitchell was playing a game. He had been playing this same game, without letup, for the last five years—ever since his third wife, an erstwhile night club cutie, had walked off with seven trunks of clothes, two mink coats and a cash settlement of a million dollars.

It was an interesting game, in a way. At least, it kept old Mitchell happy, even though it drove most of his retainers half out of their minds, through the years.

A pointing finger reaches through the gates of death!

Mitchell reached out his long, thin hand and pulled the service cord. He yanked it once, twice, three times and Nurse Maybelle Thomas came into the bedroom, nervously, with worried anticipation.

"Yes, sir?" She surveyed the half-eaten tray of food. "Wasn't your breakfast satisfactory?"

They studied each other. Miss Thomas was in her forties, slim, blond and wiry. She had watery gray eyes, string hair and white, drawn skin over her sharp, narrow face.

If you stuck her with a pin, a little honest blood might ooze out. And then again, it might be ice water.

Mitchell was equally charming. He was short, stocky, and had a white, bald head that gleamed even when he powdered it—which was seldom. His sharp, knowing dark eyes peered cynically through yellow tortoise-shell glasses, which had the effect of giving old age a rather disconcerting New Look.

"You didn't eat your oatmeal," Miss Thomas resumed tentatively.

"Of course I didn't, my dear. I never swallow this hogwash—you know that better than I. Tell me, Miss Thomas—do you burn the water when you brew tea?"

Miss Thomas flushed. "Perhaps you'd like scrambled eggs?" she said. But her teeth bit into her lip.

OLD MITCHELL waved a long, waggish finger. "Temper, my dear! Temper! We mustn't bite our lips, now must we? I'm sorry if I offended you. Really I am. You just can't imagine how much I think of the people whose wages I pay."

I've been imagining it for five long years, Miss Thomas thought hatefully. I imagine, and you put your maniacal meanness to daily practise. Some day I'll put my imagination to work. Then we'll see who gets carried out of here feet first.

"Oh, I'm sure you're thinking about us all the time," she replied sweetly.

Mitchell's mouth hardened, but for once he held his tongue.

Tokarz came in shortly after noon. He wore Army surplus fatigue clothes, and an Air Corps mechanic's leather jacket. Tokarz had been tinkering with Mitchell's seven-passenger limousine, adjusting the points, cleaning the spark plugs. He had been at it all morning, and he was hungry.

At lunch, in a kitchen alcove, he pointed an admonitory fork at Maybelle Thomas.

"Say—this hamburg roast is swell! Dig in, honey."

Miss Thomas blushed. She liked this big, good-natured Polish boy with the broad round face who'd taken the chauffeur's job four months ago. She liked him so much, in fact, that she was afraid to think what she would do to make him happy.

"I-I guess I haven't any appetite today, Mike."

Tokarz frowned. "The old buzzard been makin' cracks again?"

Miss Thomas nodded. "Sometimes I think I could kill him!"

"Why don't you?"

"Oh, don't say such a thing!" Maybelle Thomas pleaded. "Don't even *think* it!"

Tokarz took her hand in his, under the table. "Look, kid. He's not my problem. He's not your problem, either. I take him for a ride every other day—in more ways than one. Why don't you do the same?"

"I don't get what you mean, Mike."

"It's simple." Tokarz lit a cigarette. "I run up big gasoline and repair bills in the village. Old Mitchell pays by check—thinks he's smart, the old crock. So the gas station and the garage give me a healthy kickback every month, and who's the wiser?"

Miss Thomas gasped. "Why, that's dishonest! You shouldn't be telling me these things."

"Well," Tokarz kidded, "you just said you wanted to murder the old miser. Now we've both got secrets to keep!"

After lunch, old Mitchell snoozed for an hour. Then he called for Nurse Thomas and had himself dressed. This was Wednesday, and he always went for a drive with young Tokarz on Wednesday afternoons.

Miss Thomas got him into his wheel chair, which she pushed to the small private elevator. The elevator descended to the basement floor, where Tokarz was waiting.

And so they got the old man into his limousine and out for his "health ride," as Mitchell cynically called it.

His health, in fact, was the bane of his employees' existence. Mitchell regarded his personal state as a weapon to shock and annoy his retainers. At various times in the last few years, he had suffered long and loudly from varicose veins, pleurisy, arthritis, digestive disorders and a moderate heart ailment.

At least, he thought it was moderate.

Hence, having nothing better to do, he was able to maintain the fiction of "poor health." Unfortunately—or so it seemed to his frustrated employees—his various ills and chills always occurred separately, never in combination sufficient to do him in.

This was a particularly unhappy circumstance, so it was whispered about, because all of the estate people were mentioned in old Mitchell's will.

Minnie Zotter, his faithful cook, was down for twenty-five thousand dollars alone.

"Whitey" Peterson, the venerable old gardener, was listed for ten thousand in cash. Because he had been on the estate only four months, young Tokarz was not in the will; but a codicil would be added after his first year's service, Mitchell had let it be known.

AND MAYBELLE THOMAS was to get five thousand dollars, in addition to all the therapeutic equipment in Mitchell's personal infirmary.

"You can marry a middle-aged doctor when I am dead," the old miser had told her, his voice a purring sneer. "Just

think how much you'll have to offer him!"

And Nurse Thomas had gone running off to her room, to drench her pillow with tears of rage and hate.

Meanwhile, old Mitchell continued to live out his mean, unloved lifespan.

Miss Thomas lay now on her bed, drowsy from lunch, yet with a certain mental alertness that drove complete rest away. Old Mitchell had had another heart attack just two weeks before. The doctor had come in with an attendant and some heavy equipment, to make a cardiograph test.

The nurse and the physician had studied the results carefully, though Miss Thomas was hardly an expert.

"He's growing older, of course," Dr. Carlton had said. "His heart shows it too. We probably won't all have gray hair before he's gone."

He won't linger until I have gray hair, Nurse Thomas thought bitterly. My hair may be a stringy blond, but it isn't gray yet. It never will be gray, either, during the old coot's lifetime, she told herself.

I'll have my five thousand dollar bequest yet. And I'll have Mike Tokarz too.

Nobody lives forever!

Old Mitchell was back from his drive at three-thirty. Nurse Thomas met him in the driveway, helped him out of the limousine into his wheel chair and thence into the elevator.

This is your last ride in God's free air, she thought. This is the last time I have to push your old body around on wheel-chair tires. This is the last time I help you back into bed, and pull the covers over your thin, bony legs.

This is the end.

At four-thirty, Maybelle Thomas went into the infirmary, adjoining the bedroom, and heated Mitchell's afternoon glass of milk. She brought it into him a few minutes later, on a tray with graham crackers.

Mitchell bit into a cracker. "It's stale, my dear," he said. "Have you been carry-

ing it around in your handbag all week?"

"I haven't been out of the house in five days, sir," Miss Thomas told him evenly. "I've had no occasion to use my handbag."

Old Mitchell sipped his milk with a slight frown. "In other words, you are telling me to go jump in the lake."

Miss Thomas was entirely composed. "The suggestion is your own, sir—not mine," she said coldly.

She went about the room then, drawing the shades slightly, closing the door that led into the hallway. She shut the door into the infirmary too. When she returned to the bed, she saw old Mitchell start suddenly, and then clutch his heart.

"Miss Thomas!" he moaned, pathetic with pain. "M—my heart—it's another attack! Phone Dr. Carlton!"

Nurse Thomas coolly left the tray on the bed, as Mitchell watched her with growing alarm in his feverish eyes. But his face was white as the sheet that covered him, and his mouth was taut and drawn

"Miss Thomas! Get the doctor at once!"

Maybelle Thomas drew up a chair and sat down. Her sharp gray eyes bored into the sick millionaire's.

"Death becomes you, Mr. Mitchell," she said, accenting each word. "Dying, you act almost human. I trust you enjoyed your milk, Mr. Mitchell. It is the last liquid you will ever taste."

"There was an overdose of digitalis in that milk, Mr. Mitchell. It is acting upon your heart, even now. Already you are almost too weak to talk. I shall make certain you do not give an alarm. And I'm sure you can't get out of bed and walk to the hallway."

"If you tried—believe me, sir, I would cheerfully smother you with your own pillow."

Presently, with one last hate-filled glance, Nurse Thomas rose and went into the infirmary. She closed the door quietly behind her. She would never see old Maurice Mitchell alive again.

She knew it, and he knew it too. Her last mental picture of her victim was of a sick, gasping old man, obviously too weak to reach up and yank the heavy service cord. An old man with a tray on his bed. The glass of milk, two-thirds empty, he had put previously on the night table beside his bed.

And on the nightstand stood a reading lamp. It was unlit—lifeless as the old man who owned it would soon be.

MISS THOMAS went straight to her room. There was a slight film of perspiration on her forehead now. She went into the closet, found a key, opened her suitcase, and dug into it for a pint of good whisky she kept for emotional emergencies.

She held the open bottle to her lips, took a good stiff drink, and recapped the bottle. After a moment or two, she began to feel all of one piece again. She went to her dresser, took a peppermint drop and let it dissolve slowly in her mouth, to kill the whisky breath.

Within a half hour, she reentered old Mitchell's bedroom from the hallway, switching on the ceiling light as she always did. She tiptoed over to the bed.

The old man was as dead as ever he would be.

Her heart leaping with sudden fear and instant elation, Nurse Thomas ran to the hallway, ran downstairs, ran into the kitchen and almost threw herself at young Mike Tokarz.

"H—he's dead!" she shouted. "I think Mr. Mitchell is dead! A heart attack! He's lying there so still and white!"

Tokarz whistled softly. He went to the phone and called Dr. Carlton, while Miss Thomas and Minnie Zotter, the faithful Mitchell cook, hurried upstairs to the dead man's side.

Nurse Thomas did what she could, quickly and efficiently, to bring back life to a corpse of her own making. She was still busily at it, when trim, dark-haired Dr. Carlton came in, not bothering to shuck his coat, and strode immediately to the bed.

He lifted an eyelid, peered for a moment. Annoyed at the subdued lighting in the room, he switched on the bedside table lamp and looked again.

"Dead, of course," he declared softly. "How did it happen?"

Maybelle Thomas lied expertly, and the physician nodded. And then something caught his eye. He stared at it a long minute, and then he looked long and hard at Nurse Thomas.

Miss Thomas' face drained of its color. Her wide, fascinated eyes followed the direction of Dr. Carlton's sardonic stare. There it was, weakly, shakily scrawled on the paper lampshade:

Miss Thomas Poisoned Me

The woman gasped. "He's lying! You know he's lying!"

Dr. Carlton's eyes never left her face. "Perhaps. An autopsy will tell the story, no doubt. You know, Miss Thomas, that old Mr. Mitchell was a famous chemical

engineer before he retired. But perhaps you don't know that a man can use milk as an invisible ink.

"That's what Mr. Mitchell did. He dipped his finger in the glass of milk, there on the nightstand, and scrawled his accusation on the lampshade. When I turned on the lamp—as he knew someone would—the bulb warmed up and heated the paper shade. That made those fatal words come out."

Nurse Thomas gaped at the brown, streaked letters.

"I'm sorry, in a way," Dr. Carlton said, in tones that held a certain regret. "I didn't want to tell you, or anyone else—professional reticence and all that, you know.

"But remember that heart examination two weeks ago? The fact is, Mr. Mitchell had only three months more to live. It's too bad you couldn't wait that long, Miss Thomas.

"I'm sure it would have been worth your while."



THE CRIME QUIZ

HOW much do you know about crime? The following questions will not only test your knowledge, but will add to your information on many interesting crime topics. Give yourself 20 points for each question you answer correctly. A score of 60 is good. 80 ranks you as an amateur detective. If you are 100 per cent correct—you're a super-sleuth! The answers are on Page 143, if you must look!

1. What is "embezzlement"?
2. Is a police officer guilty of any crime if he has to kill a man while attempting to make an arrest?
3. Can a person's fingerprints be changed or permanently removed from his fingers?
4. The average step length of a person walking slowly is about 27 inches. Would the step length be greater or smaller when he is walking faster? How about when when he is running?
5. Is it possible for a person to choke himself to death with his own hands?



Fleming found Dr. Cotes beneath a low bush, strangled to death

The Killer and His Dead

Two corpses lay side by side—and Detective Fleming had to find out which was the murderer and which the victim!

DETECTIVE-LIEUTENANT Jim Fleming walked through the open front door and down the hall to a room from which voices issued. Angry voices. Fleming went in and came to an abrupt stop.

There were five people in the room. Three were alive; two were dead. One of the live ones was a short, grizzled,

crusty old cuss named Dr. Cotes, of the Medical Examiner's staff. At the moment Dr. Cotes was kneeling between the two bodies.

The dead men had been at least sixty. Both had been shot through the head. Dr. Cotes arose slowly, a sly grin beginning at the corners of his mouth.

"Well, well," he said. "The great Lieu-

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

tenant Fleming of Homicide. Smartest murder man on the force. I admit it because you made a fool of me six months ago on the Logan case."

"Aren't you ever going to forget that, Doc?" Fleming said. "You said it was suicide, I claimed it was murder, and the killer is waiting to go to the chair. We all make mistakes. You made one on that case."

Cotes flushed, and his grin died away. "But people don't forget, Fleming. They still laugh behind my back. I will forget it though. This one is all yours now. Two dead men. Alan Barrett, worth a million dollars, and Matt Talbin, not worth a million pennies."

"What else?" Fleming asked. Cotes was gloating for some reason.

The Assistant Medical Examiner stepped back.

"Look it over, Lieutenant. Both men are dead of contact head wounds. No question about that. The gun was practically pressed against the scalp. Both wounds are such that either could be self-inflicted. The dead men lie ten yards apart. The murder gun lies midway between them."

"So?" Fleming asked.

"So it's a cinch. All you have to do is figure out which man is the murderer. Whoever it is, he killed himself, but I'm betting you can't tell which is which. Murderer or victim. Killer or his dead."

Fleming whistled softly and made a quick examination. Dr. Cotes was not exaggerating. One of these men had murdered the other and then killed himself. Fleming walked out into the hallway and called in a detective named Marsh, who was busy packing scientific equipment in a black valise.

"How about it?" Fleming asked. "Any prints on the gun?"

Marsh shook his head. "You know guns don't take good prints, Lieutenant. I found portions of fingerprints. I'd say they came from the hands of both dead men."

"How about the dermal nitrate test?" Fleming asked.

"I tried that," Marsh said. "Got a positive reaction for gun powder."

"Then whose hand was the powder on?"

"Both of them. I'm getting out of here,

Lieutenant, before I go batty. I've tried to figure out which is which—murderer-suicide or victim. I can't do it, but I'll tell you this much. I think Doc Cotes knows."

"If he does, he'll hang onto it until I admit I'm stumped," Fleming said. "Then he'll pull his big stunt and get back at me. He hates my insides because I made a sap out of him a few months ago. Okay, Marsh, you may leave any time you wish."

FLEMING went back into the room. He studied the set-up carefully, and knew there was nothing now evident which would indicate which man had died first and, therefore, had been the victim. The only hope seemed to lie in the motive.

Fleming turned to the other two men present. Doc Cotes was chortling in glee. He sat behind the big blond-wood desk, making out his reports.

"This is Phil Barrett, the son of Alan Barrett, the man who lies closest to this desk," Cotes said. "This other is Ralph Talbin, grandson of the other dead man. They can tell you an interesting story, Lieutenant."

Phil Barrett was forty-odd, somewhat stuffy-looking. He had gray and brown hair, a round face, and wore expensive clothing tastefully. Ralph Talbin was much younger. He would have looked like a high school junior had it not been for the harsh, wise lines around the corners of his eyes.

Phil Barrett cleared his throat. "Lieutenant," he said, "my father did not murder Talbin. I'm certain of it. But young Talbin here is just as sure his grandfather is not a murderer. It all goes far back. My father and Mr. Talbin used to be partners in a manufacturing business. Dad bought out Talbin, finally, and through the promotion of a new product made the business successful."

"Don't leave things out, Barrett," young Talbin broke in. "Don't forget that this new product was something my grandfather invented, and that your father took over and made a million on."

"I'm not forgetting that," Barrett said. "Nor the fact that my father supported your grandfather. It's still a

moot question who thought up that valuable product. Dad claimed he did, and that he paid your grandfather to keep him quiet. He was forever loudly proclaiming that Dad was a thief."

"He paid because he owed it to my grandfather!" young Talbin shouted.

"Okay, okay," Fleming said. "It was a long-standing feud. Each man thought the other was a heel. One of them was. This is Barrett's house. Why did Talbin come here?"

"I drove him here, Lieutenant," young Talbin said. "He wasn't well, had an idea he had only a short time to live. He wanted Barrett to give him a lump sum payment so I'd be taken care of. I waited outside in the car which I parked outside the gate. Soon after we got here, Mr. Phil Barrett here came down to talk to me. He said we were fools not to be friends, and that we should persuade our relatives to stop all this fighting."

"I see," Fleming nodded. "Where were you two when the shots were fired?"

"In the car down by the gate, as Talbin said," Barrett answered quickly. "We're each other's alibi. We heard the first shot, and didn't quite know what it was. The gate is some distance away, you know. Then there was a second shot half a minute later and we started running to the house. We reached the door, but it was locked and it took us maybe five or six minutes to break it down. While we were doing this, the third shot rang out."

"You heard no sounds or voices you could identify?"

"No—not even a moan. They were both dead when we entered."

"Then what happened?"

Barrett fidgeted nervously. "Well, Talbin said we shouldn't touch the phone on the desk, and he told me to use another in calling the police. That's what I did. Talbin stayed here."

Dr. Cotes was idly rotating a small squat brown bottle that looked as if it were a medicine bottle between his fingers and grinning like an ape.

"My father's," Barrett said. "He kept it in that desk."

"Lieutenant," Cotes said, "how are you doing? Which is which? Killer and victim? Why don't you name the man?"

Fleming sighed. "I will, Doc. Right now I want this room cleared. There's something here to tell me the truth. There has to be."

They filed out, Dr. Cotes first. Fleming closed the battered door as much as it would close and went to work. He spent half an hour going over that room and found nothing to help. He finally called in the boys from the morgue.

THAT took another ten minutes. Fleming went hunting Talbin and Barrett. He found them in the living room, drinking highballs and smoking.

"We've decided to call off the feud," Talbin explained. "How have you been doing? Know who the murderer is yet?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," Fleming said. "I'm hoping you two will give me a lead. Here is what I know, right on the line. Both men died of contact head wounds. Either could have been self-inflicted or the work of a murderer. Both had handled the gun from which only two bullets had apparently been discharged. Both had fired some gun, for a parafin test proved that. The gun lay between them. The suicide could have stood there, fired a bullet into his temple and dropped the weapon. It's logical to assume the dying man staggered backward from the force of the bullet and fell—several feet from his victim. The evidence doesn't show which man died last. I have to depend on your statements to get the truth."

"I can't help you," Talbin said.

"It's as much a mystery to me as it is to you, Lieutenant," Barrett added.

"I've a feeling Dr. Cotes knows more than he admits," Fleming said. "Did either of you notice him do anything suspicious?"

"I didn't," Barrett said. "But why don't you ask the doctor? His car is still out back. He must be around."

Fleming hurried through the house, down the rear steps and found the relic Dr. Cotes called a car. By now Cotes should have been at the morgue to begin the autopsy. Fleming started hunting the man. He found him, many minutes later. Dr. Cotes had been shoved beneath a low bush. There were black and blue marks around his throat. He had been strangled to death.

Fleming searched him quickly and found one pocket turned inside out. Doc had already been searched. Then there had been a clue and the murderer had seen Doc take it away. Otherwise Doc wouldn't have been strangled to death and then searched.

Fleming returned to the house. Talbin and Barrett were still in the living room, working on fresh highballs. Fleming asked them to account for their movements after they left the murder room.

"I just wandered around," Talbin said. "I went upstairs to my rooms," Barrett said. "Why? What's happened?"

"Doc Cotes has been murdered," Fleming said. "Whoever did it took evidence from him and maybe I've got the lead I want. Talbin, if your grandfather was proved the victim, you could sue the Barrett estate and collect."

"I intend to," Talbin admitted.

"And you—" Fleming faced Barrett—"would have the estate intact if your father was the victim. Which gives either one of you a motive for concealing evidence which points at the killer. Stay here till I come back."

Fleming went to the murder room and sat down behind the desk. He slowly reconstructed every event, small or large, which had transpired between the time he had arrived and Dr. Cotes had departed. There seemed to be nothing in the form of a clue. Cotes must have already had the evidence in his pocket. But Cotes hadn't been too cocky about the whole thing until just before he left. Perhaps he found something while he was seated at this desk.

Fleming went over the desk. It was hopeless. He reached for the thermos of water. There was only one glass, half filled. The water in it was quite cool and certainly far from being stale. He tried to associate this glass with Dr. Cotes' movements. That didn't work.

Fleming placed himself in the position of the two dead men. One must have taken a drink of water. True, both were probably excited to a point where they needed a drink, but in the heat of an argument, would either have been apt to notice this? Why then, had the water been poured and part of it imbibed?

To take medicine. The thought hit

Fleming, and was followed by the memory of Doc Cotes rotating a small squat brown bottle between his fingers. The bottle was missing.

Fleming yelled for Barrett, and the middle-aged man hurried into the room.

"Was your father sick?" Fleming asked. "Did he take medicine?"

"Why—yes," Barrett said. "There were capsules. They had to be taken right on time. Every three hours. He took one at dinner time."

"Then he would have been due to take another at ten o'clock. The murder happened about that time. Go back and keep Talbin company, Mr. Barrett. . . Oh yes, where did your father have the prescription filled?"

Barrett thought a moment. "The Hillside Pharmacy. What are you getting at, Lieutenant?"

"A killer! That's all."

FLEMING picked up the phone and called the morgue. He contacted a doctor who would perform the autopsy, and asked that Barrett's body be examined first. Fleming gave some specific instructions, then hung up. He leaned back, lit a cigarette and stared at the ceiling. He had the solution. The clue which Dr. Cotes had hidden, but Fleming mentally gave Cotes all the credit. The physician had recognized something because of his scientific background.

An hour later Fleming answered the phone and made a few notes. Then he drew his service pistol, kept it handy, and called in Barrett and Talbin.

"I've got the answer," he said. "I know who killed whom. Dr. Cotes didn't know at the time, but he was on his way to finding out and somehow one of you guessed it. I suspect because you saw Cotes secretly steal a bottle of capsules from this desk."

Barrett looked nervous. "I didn't kill the doctor. I was upstairs. I swear it!"

Talbin stood there, silent and grim.

"It's you, Talbin," Fleming said quietly. "I know your grandfather is the murderer. He came here to browbeat Barrett, found it couldn't be done, so attacked him. Barrett fired a shot. It missed your grandfather and went through the open window. Then your grandfather got the gun away from him

and sent a bullet through Barrett's head. Once the deed was done, he realized it was murder. So he killed himself.

"Circumstances made it impossible to tell who was the murderer, but circumstances crossed themselves up. There were three shots, one unaccounted for. You told me this yourself. But there were four slugs in that six shooter. Somebody slipped a fresh bullet into the gun to take the place of the one fired out of the window. The only time that could have been done was when one man was alone in this room. You sent Barrett out to give you the opportunity."

"Where are your witnesses?" Talbin shouted. "This is purely guessing."

"These are facts," Fleming said. "Barrett took a capsule at ten o'clock, while your grandfather was here. He was killed a minute or two later. A man with murder and suicide on his mind doesn't bother about taking medicine. But even that would be weak. The clincher lies in the fact that medicine taken orally requires a certain time to go through the system. If Barrett had been the last man alive—eight or ten minutes after he'd killed Talbin, the drug would have been at least partly absorbed by

the system. The autopsy showed this did not happen. Barrett died while the drug was still in his stomach, so he was the first man to die, and the first man was the murder victim."

"What's it going to get you, Lieutenant?" Talbin said. "Do you think you can punish my grandfather? Strap his corpse in the electric chair?"

Fleming shook his head. "The heir of the murderer knew the truth about who killed whom. He also realized that Doc Cotes was aware of it. So he killed the Doc. I'm talking about you, Talbin."

Talbin turned on his heel, shoved Barrett aside and leaped toward the door. The bullet from Lieutenant Fleming's gun was much faster. Talbin came to a stop, raised his hands high and winced at the sight of the bullet-hole in the door frame close by his head. Fleming came around the desk, with handcuffs. He put them on Talbin.

"Doc Cotes wouldn't have liked me to solve his murder so fast," he said. "If he'd have had his way, it would have been a case to baffle every detective on the force. Doc was funny that way, but I liked him. And Talbin, I don't like the man who killed him. Let's go!"



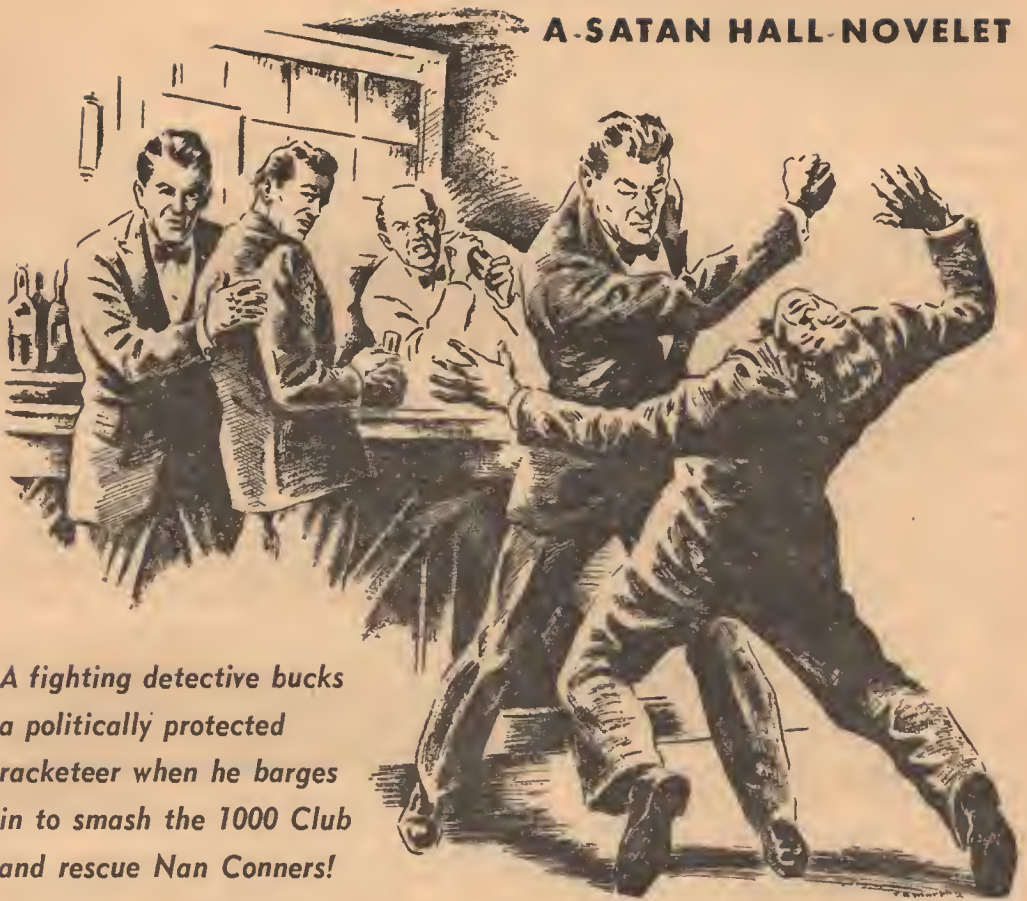
From the Annals of Criminology

CRIMINOLOGISTS know that there are no two identical fingerprints. This applies, of course, only to the carefully taken prints that go to make up the files of our law enforcement agencies. Blurred or fragmentary prints, however, may sometimes resemble those of a person to whom they actually do not belong. Police, however, do not accept such fingerprints as conclusive evidence. To be accepted as conclusive, a fingerprint must compare with that of a suspect on twelve or more characteristic points.

LAUNDRIES now use an invisible, indelible ink in marking clothing. This marking can be seen only under ultra violet light. For this reason, police officers and detectives always subject to ultra violet scrutiny any tablecloth, napkin, handkerchief, towel, underwear, shirt, or other item of washable clothing that may have some bearing on a criminal case!

UNNOTICEABLE secret marks known as "scratch marks" are often put on pieces of valuable jewelry by the manufacturers. Police are thus frequently enabled to make identification of valuable stolen jewelry that otherwise might have no distinguishing characteristic.

EASIEST way to copy a signature—trace it with the aid of carbon paper and then fill in the tracing with ink. Police, however, can easily detect such forgeries—for microscopic examination of the writing immediately reveals parts of the carbon tracing under the ink!



*A fighting detective bucks
a politically protected
racketeer when he barges
in to smash the 1000 Club
and rescue Nan Conners!*

I am the Law

CHAPTER I

No Time to Bluff

IT WAS on the third of the month that Detective "Satan" Hall walked out of the Good Samaritan Hospital slightly dazed by the Police Commissioner's critical illness. It had been a minor operation and the Commissioner of Police had seemed in such fine shape the day before. Yet Dr. John

Quincy Landon, New York's most famous surgeon, had looked grave and greatly disturbed, pointing out to Hall that only too often simple operations developed serious complications.

To Satan Hall the commissioner was one of the permanent cornerstones of the city government. It had never en-

by **CARROLL JOHN DALY**

tered his head until now that some day the commissioner might possibly die.

Detective Hall set his chin and went determinedly about his business, the business of preventing and punishing crime.

He worked at it twelve hours a day and it was his hobby for the rest of the time. He thought of it the few minutes that he lay awake and dreamed of it until he woke up in the morning. It wasn't just a part of his life. It was the whole of his life. Perhaps he never thought of it that way, but the top-notchers in law-and-order and lawlessness-and-disorder thought of him in that way.

He was thinking now of a girl—Nan Conners, who, if she didn't have the best looks and the finest figure along Broadway, certainly had the fastest fingers in the world. The Great Nestor, the Magician, now retired, was preparing to go back on the stage again and feature this girl whose hands were actually quicker than the eyes and whose supple body was almost as fast.

But Satan Hall was thinking of her in connection with crime. He had saved her life a couple of times and sprung her father from jail on one occasion, in return for certain information. That she had perhaps saved his life once seemed fairly assured. But if she had done it for Satan or for herself was open to question, the answer to which left Satan Hall with a feeling of indifference.

His association with her along the Avenue and her sudden disappearance from any activities, except dancing and singing in the chorus at the 1000 Club, had caused some gossip that the feared Detective Hall had made use of her and then thrown her to the wolves. He had visited the Great Nestor, and though he had met the man on several occasions, was received with roundabout insinuations that certain parties or party had let Nestor backers know that the show was not to go on with Nan Conners. Hall also got the idea from

Nestor's coldness that he, too, felt that Satan deserted the girl in trouble—if not danger.

SATAN did not question Nestor nor even try to glare him down for that poor opinion. He nodded and said simply:

"It's like this, Nestor. If you feel like going through with the show and the girl—make your plans. Make them privately without involving expense. But be ready, when the time comes, to put on your show—and the girl. I think she has the stuff."

Nan Conners had worked her way up to sing and dance, and finally to do mind reading acts at the swankiest club in the city. And now she was in a chorus at the 1000 Club. Not that the 1000 Club was a dump. It wasn't. It had changed hands and was turning into quite a place. A dozen of those strange creatures known as Cafe Society had put money into it.

This was supposed to be very hush-hush, but Satan knew that most of them had volunteered their own connection with it. But what wasn't hush-hush was that Otis Henley, the boy who had come up from the gutter, was running it. Otis Henley, petty thief, the product of several institutions and the graduate of more than one prison. Racketeer, gunman, gambler. Yes—and twice charged with murder.

Otis Henley had been a vicious criminal, but he was a man who had come up without hiding his past. Not that he could. He capitalized on his vices, making them into virtues. His self-advertised pleasant smile and handshake were accompanied by the frank admission, "Otis Henley is the name—the man who came up from the gutter."

In certain so-called society—those that had more money than brains—this new approach was popular. He had made his vices attractive to those who mocked our laws but feared to break them. He was a good politician from the beginning. Now he was actively in-

terested in city politics which to him meant one single thing—protection and graft. And this man, Satan knew, was the one who was holding Nan Connors, both physically and mentally, in his power. Just how, Satan didn't know.

All this was in Satan's mind as he went straight to the 1000 Club that afternoon. One thing, that this Henley was always in his office upstairs about that time. Was Satan thinking of the girl? Perhaps even Satan didn't know. But he was thinking of the law and the



SATAN HALL

lawless and his standing among them, and what it would mean to his reputation if it were even thought that he deserted anyone who had aided him.

He knew that was the word going through the grapevine of the under part of the great city. He couldn't be sure if it started as a truth or was simply started to discredit him, but he had heard the whispered word, too, that he, Detective Satan Hall, was tossing over the girl Nan through fear of Otis Henley, who had come from state politics back into the night life, the lime-light, the crime light of New York.

The 1000 Club Bar had few customers at that hour. The head bartender lifted the little phone back of the bar almost the very second Satan entered the door. He was a well trained man. Satan

nodded. He walked straight to the bar.

"As long as you're talking to Otis Henley, tell him I'm here to see him," Satan said.

The bartender spoke into the phone. "You want to see Detective Hall?"

"Tell him I'm going to see him—now," Satan suggested.

The bartender looked at those slanting gray eyes a moment, took in the sharp nose, the pointed chin, even the one tapering ear that showed on the left side of the dark fedora. He took in all the features that had given Satan his name. Then he said into the phone:

"Detective Hall, Charlie. He wants to see the boss—says he's going to see him." He listened a moment, then turned to Satan. "That's Charlie Hanlon, the new manager. He'll be down. What'll you have?"

"White Rock," Satan said and, when he had the drink, the bartender said with a grin, "Your money's no good here, boy. On the house."

"No." Satan laid down a quarter.

The bartender grinned.

"Well, if you're going to be so darned ethical about it—it's four bits."

"I'm not that ethical," Satan told him. "I want a dime change."

THE bartender grinned again. He wasn't a man who made bad friends around. He rang up the money and handed Satan a dime. It was then that a broad, squat toadlike man appeared and came down the bar toward Satan. It wasn't the first time Satan had seen Charlie Hanlon, but it was the first time he had met him. Hanlon was new on the Avenue, a Chicago product. His face and his walk and his hard eyes and set mouth all belied the friendly name Charlie. He said without preliminary:

"Suppose the boss doesn't want to see you? What then?"

Satan was as abrupt. "Then I'll go up and see him."

"Suppose—" Hard eyes with ice behind them stayed right on Satan. "Suppose there are a couple of men on the

stairs—armed men with licenses to carry those guns and the right to use them while on private property?"

Satan's green eyes opened wide. He had heard about Charlie Hanlon, how hard he was.

He only said, "Are you kidding, Hanlon?"

"No," Hanlon said. "I'm not kidding. What then?"

Satan's green eyes narrowed. "Then I'll go up to see him through a cloud of smoke."

"Police business?" Hanlon asked.

"One policeman's business," Satan told him. "Mine."

"I don't believe you," Hanlon said slowly, and raising his voice so the bartenders could hear. "I don't believe you'd dare." Sometime someone would have to call Satan's bluff. Hanlon thought he was that man and that this was the time.

"Okay." Satan nodded his head vigorously. "You can check on it right away. Don't bother to come with me—I know my way."

Hanlon stood his ground and a moment later was amazed at the strength and force Satan put into the simple gesture of brushing him aside. At least it looked like a simple, even a friendly, gesture. Hanlon was a strong man, yet he knew that if the bar had not been there he would have gone down on the marble floor. He recovered quickly. Nothing showed on his face. His voice changed a little, a very little. But the head bartender raised his head in surprise. Another stopped still and looked toward Hanlon.

Hanlon said simply, "Under those circumstances, Detective Hall, Mr. Henley will see you. I'll go up with you." And turning to the bartender, "Tell the boss Detective Hall is coming up with me. Say 'That's how it is.' Say exactly 'That's how it is.'"

Charlie Hanlon led Satan to the end of the bar, turned left and, while passing a little door, tossed over his shoulder; "It's okay, Detective Hall. I like to

know where a guy stands right from the beginning."

"Sure—sure—" Satan said. There was simple agreement in his voice, nothing of good nature and certainly nothing of light banter. "Lots of guys get their bluff called."

Hanlon pointed to the stairs. Two men stood there. Their right hands were under their left armpits.

"I wasn't bluffing," said Hanlon. "I never bluff."

"Then what?"

"Oh!" Hanlon shrugged his shoulders. "I got the idea you weren't bluffing either."

"That's right," said Satan. "That's smart. You're learning fast. A lot of guys learn the hard way. Remember that. I always get where I'm going."

They were on the stairs now, going slowly up them. The two gunmen had disappeared at the wave of Hanlon's hand. Hanlon kept pursuing the same train of thought.

"Someday you'll get where you're going—in a hearse," he said.

"I've heard that one before."

"From whom?"

"Plenty guys. Dead guys. Guys like you—who don't kid."

CHAPTER II

Tough Way Out



SATAN thought it jarred the man in the semi-darkness of the hallway. It didn't matter to him. These hard silent men never bothered Satan. Hanlon was a killer and had courage, but Hanlon was a hater too. The combination was never a good one for the lad who held it. Killers with both courage and hatred took chances. Lads who took chances with Satan made a mistake—their last mistake.

A door to the right swung open. A tall man stood there. Satan had never seen him before. In the bright light of the several lamps in the room and the one over the flat desk he appeared younger than Satan had imagined. Satan recognized him, of course. It was Otis Henley.

"Come in, come in." A sturdy hand with long slender but strong fingers gripped Satan's hand. "I don't think we've met, Hall. Have a cigar, a drink maybe. Ah, well—I remember now. You are all business. Don't tell me Charlie here was bluffing you." His whole make-up was good nature, his smile seemed generous, his grip was a welcoming one.

"No," Satan said, "he wasn't."

Henley laughed. He went back into the room and stood by his desk until Satan sat down in the soft chair Henley indicated.

"I'm really glad to see you," he told Satan as if he meant it. "We'd have to meet, once I came back into business. I've missed the bright lights, I guess. I came up by a hard road—just a city boy out of the gutter." And as Satan sat there, he turned to Charlie Hanlon.

"Well, Charlie. You had your way. You told me how you could handle them all. I wanted to see how you handled our friend here." He laughed pleasantly. "Run along, Charlie. Satan evidently wants something." And his friendly blue eyes twinkling, "I imagine he's a man who gets what he wants."

Charlie left. The thick door closed. Satan looked around the room. It was a large room with a little den off at one side, but there were no thick curtains, no place a man could hide with a gun, nothing but the open door of the den with a light shining in the doorway.

"Nothing up my sleeve." Henley's laugh was pleasant. "Everything open and aboveboard." And drawing his brows slightly, "I know you are a busy man. Now what can I do for you?"

"Well—" Satan spoke slowly. "There's been some talk going around the Avenue that I let a young girl get

shoved around—after she did me a favor."

"And did you?" Henley leaned back in his chair and watched Satan. He was still smiling, still pleasant.

"I didn't think she ever did me a favor."

"Then you feel no responsibility to her?"

"None." Satan's green eyes were steady. "But I feel a responsibility to myself. I don't like such talk. People who might be thinking of doing me a favor might believe it—and not do me a favor."

Henley's mouth closed. He didn't smile any more.

"I can see that," he said gravely. "Yes, I can see your point of view there. You'd like me to give her a good part in the review, eh?" He seemed to be thinking. "Well—it might be done."

"No," said Satan. "I want to see her now. She is living here in the Club One Thousand. Her name is Nan Connors."

"Oh! Miss Connors, yes!" Henley's frown left. "I set up a couple of rooms for Miss Connors and some of the other girls. She's got real talent. I thought she had been shoved along too quickly. We're bringing her along more slowly now." And with a smile, "She'll be a headliner. I feel sure of that. She's the redhead, isn't she?"

"That's right," said Satan. "I'd like to see her—now." And as Henley started to shake his head as if in doubt, Satan added, "Tell her to dress for the street and bring her bag with her."

"I'm afraid," Henley said, "it isn't as easy as that. I doubt if she would see you." He leaned forward now, bit off the end of a cigar he took from a humidor on the desk. "In fact, I know she won't see you. She thinks of nothing but her work."

THE detective eyed the smooth, glib-talking man. His lips tightened.

"You're a persuasive man," Satan told him. "You've got five minutes to con-

vince her that she should see me." And his lower lip coming up tight, "She and I will be going out of here together."

For a long minute Henley stared at Satan. Satan could not read the thoughts in the man's face because the face did not change. But he knew that Henley was making up his mind about something. A simple something. To say yes or to say no.

Somehow Satan knew that if he said no, he would mean no. And that if he meant no—he knew that Satan meant yes. He was weighing the possibilities if Satan would make good. And how—and what would be the results of Satan making good. And Henley reached a decision.

"I suppose," he said, "it's police business and you must question her about something. I won't stand in the way of



the law." He reached for one of the two phones on his desk. "I stand behind all my help, Detective Hall. I think perhaps she should have my lawyer, Mark Reiter." And after a pause, "Do you consider that necessary?"

"She is not going to be locked up, if that is what you mean," Satan told him, and seeing the gleam in Henley's eyes, "That is, if she comes along and has a talk with me."

Henley snapped up the phone, gave quick orders. Miss Connors was to come to his office at once—dressed for the street—with an overnight bag. He turned back to Satan.

"You have a strange way of returning favors—if she doesn't want to go."

"I don't believe she did me a favor," Satan repeated. "She may have started the rumor. I want it stopped."

The serious look went out of Henley's face. His smile was very pleasant.

"You are a smart man, Satan. Let us then for the moment have our beliefs, yours that the girl may have started the rumor, mine that you represent the law."

"I might have thought you started the rumor," Satan told him. "I might—"

The phone rang—the other phone on the desk. Henley picked it up. After a bit he said:

"Yes, Sydney. Is that so?" His voice was very low and very grave with a touch of sadness in it. "Much worse—that's too bad. He was a fine man—a fine man. Not much chance, you say? Well, let us hope." A longer pause and then, "There couldn't be a better man right now . . . Yes, I understand what you mean."

He put down the phone and turned to Satan. There was an expression in his eyes this time that he couldn't hide, and though he tried to make his voice low and worried, Satan caught the gloating note in it.

He said simply, "The Commissioner of Police has taken a very bad turn for the worse—very bad. Chief Inspector Fogarty has assumed his duties temporarily." And after a pause, "Do you still want to see Miss Connors?" He was reaching for the house phone.

"Yes," said Satan. "I still want to see her." And half rising and his voice deep with emotion, emotion that was an unheard-of thing to those who knew Satan, an unrecognized thing to Satan himself, "Don't lift that phone, Henley. Don't lift it!"

Henley looked at the man. Quite frankly he was the one man in the City of New York that Henley feared. Henley was going to get rid of him. But there wasn't going to be any rough stuff—not now with the commissioner out of the way.

Henley said almost quietly, "Just what could you do to stop me lifting it?"

"I could," said Satan calmly, "shoot



Satan put a bullet just below the gasping mouth of the racketeer

your hand off at the wrist."

"A most forthright man," Henley said lightly.

ALL the things he had ever heard about this man Hall went racing through his mind. But not one of them encouraged him to lift the phone. The placid calm that he prided in himself so much never left his face; yet he was conscious of a desire to bite at his lower lip. In fact, he couldn't be sure he wasn't doing it. But he still smiled as he spoke.

"Satan," he said, "you and I have never crossed. There is no reason we should cross if you walk right out of that door now—and out of my life. Every step I've taken has been upward—none backward." He paused when Satan said nothing. "But you have been anxious to get in my hair, and would have before, except that I moved in circles beyond you. Why?"

Satan shrugged his shoulders, said simply,

"You're the most dangerous type of criminal, Henley. You moved from murder to politics, from getting protection from others to giving protection yourself. As you say, you moved outside my immediate circle. Now you've stepped back in again. Why?"

"I don't know why." Otis Henley smiled pleasantly. "Suppose you tell me."

"Because," said Satan, "you are not simply watching out for your friends any more. There wasn't any money in

that. You're selling protection to strangers—anyone who'll pay the price. And what's more, you deliver the goods."

It hit Henley all right. Satan could tell that more than see it. The tenseness in the man—well, maybe not in the man but in the air.

"How interesting!" Henley tapped the desk with a pencil. "But why would I open a club to do that? Why would I step within your—shall we say—your circle?"

"Because," Satan said easily, "I am the goods you most want to deliver."

"Ah!" Henley raised his eyebrows. Then he laughed lightly. "Yes, I guess there are a lot of boys who'd spend a lot of money to see you—out of the picture. They have wasted a lot of lead and, as you say, are dead. You know—coming here today like this—about a girl—a threat to Charlie about shooting up my place when you came in, and now this threat to shoot my hand off at the wrist! Well, you've had all the breaks in life, Satan. In death too. Now, the only friend you have, the only man who tolerates you—he isn't expected to live—not given much of a chance. The new commissioner is a reasonable man. A fair minded man who will—"

Coming to his feet Henley walked to the door and opened it. He spoke quickly:

"Detective Hall—Miss Conners. He wishes you to go with him. I didn't think you'd care to go."

"I don't care to," the girl said quickly, looking at Satan. "I think Detective Hall has made a grave mistake in assuming that."

Satan had crossed to the girl.

"I am not interested in your wishes and desires, Miss Conners," he said, putting his left arm through hers and swinging her around and through the door. Henley said nothing. He wondered how it was that Satan passed so easily out that door and disappeared in the hall beyond—yet always seemed to have been facing him.

THE CASE OF

THE MYSTERIOUS LOVER

A True Crime Story

by

Raymond C. Schindler

NEXT ISSUE

CHAPTER III

Grip of the Underworld

KEEPING a tight grip on the girl's arm, Satan propelled her along until they were out on the street. Then she spoke.

"Satan," she said, "you don't know what you are doing—to yourself."

"I always know what I am doing—to myself."

"To me then."

"People don't do things to you. You do those things to yourself."

He looked down at her and noticed that she was thinner. He looked at her face, missed the fine features—saw only that her face was sharper. He looked at her eyes, didn't see the great depths back of them, only the lines under them—the haunted look.

"No," she said. "People do things to you—after you have done things to yourself. And that leaves you wide open." And with a touch of irony, "I can't protect myself behind a perfect life like yours."

Satan said quite seriously, "I don't lead the evil life some people picture. Yet I protect myself more by the evil that is supposed to be behind me, rather than the good I believe is there."

"Yes," she said a little viciously, "you kill!" And then, "I've been thinking of that too." She stopped him as they turned downtown. "Satan, if I did kill—and you—just you knew— Oh, it isn't an alibi I want. It isn't—"

"I'd drag you in," Satan told her. "That's the law. I am the law."

"That's true." Her voice was not too calm. "You are a machine too. Let me go. I'm not free to go where I please and protect myself behind either good or evil." And as he moved her on, "Where are we going?"

"You are safe now," Satan told her.

"No one will bother you in the city. I'll lay that down on the line."

"Satan," she said, "where are you taking me?"

"Wherever you want to go," he told her. "We'll drop in first at Dugan's place. Plenty of big shots go there. Then you can go where you please. You won't have to go back to Henley's."

For the first time she smiled up at him. "Satan, you're taking me out on a date. Satan, I—you—you know how I felt. I told you. You do—"

"No," he told her almost brutally. And then changing his voice somewhat, "I think you've got good stuff in you, Nan. Real good stuff. That's why I wanted to see you go along with George Nestor. The show. The magic of your hands, your eyes, your—"

"My body," she helped him out. "Just why are you taking me to Dugan's?" And then, "Oh, Satan! You think they won't bother me—none of them ever when they see me with you. Is that it?"

He was startled but he didn't deny it. He said nothing.

She said:

"It won't work, Satan. Not with Otis Henley. And you see, I have to go back." And when he shook his head, "You didn't think he was keeping me there by force, did you? Physical force? He made it right by fixing up rooms for four of the girls and old Mrs. Whalen who has charge of the costumes as chaperon. I'm there because I want to stay there."

"Want to stay there?"

"Well, rather than face the consequences of not staying."

"It's not your father again," Satan said quickly. "No, it couldn't be him. He's sick on the West Coast. It's that no-good brother of yours—that step-brother. That's it."

"No." She shook her head. "He's just bad. Of course Father worried."

"So that's what it is," Satan nodded vigorously. "I never thought of that. Never thought you'd be such a fool for

such a worthless punk. Well, Nan, forget it. I'll look into him. It shouldn't be hard to find some reason for locking him up or scaring him out of the city."

"What good would that do?"

"Henley couldn't hold jail over your stepbrother if he was in one. It isn't murder, is it?"

NAN absorbed the shock of that remark. She caught her breath.

"Satan—Satan!" she said sharply. "It is not my stepbrother. He's no good. Worthless as you say. And I'm not such a sap as that. Not such a sentimentalist as—as—or maybe—but don't pick up my brother." She jerked back, setting her feet firmly on the sidewalk. "I'm not going with you! Henley fixed up something so you'd come, make trouble—and—well—with the commissioner sick—get you broke."

Satan shrugged. "The new commissioner is honest enough."

"Fogarty?"

"Yes. How did you know? How—" And as the girl broke from him, "Nan, your trouble is not the reason I came to the Club. There were rumors around that you helped me and I let you down. I want to squelch those rumors." And when she stared at him. "It's business with me. Bad business if the underside of the city got the idea I let down those who have helped me. You don't believe me. Think I'm lying, but I simply want to protect you."

Still she looked at him for a long time. kept looking at him.

"You don't believe me," he said at length.

"Yes." She nodded. "That's the trouble, Satan. I do believe you. I wish I didn't—but I do absolutely believe you. I'll go with you, of course."

He took her into the back of Dugan's. They had a sandwich together and their conversation was rather stilted. She picked up a bit when people recognized them. Satan seemed indifferent. It was the same way when they stopped at the bar outside for a

drink. Satan saw that they were noticed together. When they left, he handed her her bag and called a taxi. Then he spoke loud enough for two men who liked to be called sporting gentlemen to hear:

"So when I want to find you, Nan, I will—" and with what was meant to be a cheerful laugh, "If you try to hide on me at the One Thousand Club, I'll take it apart—and Otis Henley with it."

He thought that about covered the situation. He was putting her bag in the car.

"Take care of yourself," he said lightly. He felt that he liked the girl—as much as he was capable of liking anyone.

"Good night," she said. "I'm going back to the One Thousand Club." And lowering her voice, "You asked me how I knew it was Fogarty. Well, Henley put on the pressure around. Called up Sydney Mercer and had Fogarty appointed. Good night."

She pulled his head down suddenly and kissed him. Satan wasn't sure if he backed out of the cab door or if she pushed him out. And he wasn't sure if he was stunned by the kiss or the statement the girl had just made—that Otis Henley had gotten Fogarty appointed.

It was possible of course. Henley had big connections at City Hall. Mostly, Satan thought, for what he knew about some of them, what he did for others—without limit. And besides, he could think of only four men for the temporary job, and Fogarty would be one of them. No, it wouldn't be too hard to swing it that way.

Satan Hall walked back into Dugan's and closed himself in a telephone booth. In a couple of minutes he had Sergeant Moffett and was buzzing in his ear. Sergeant Moffett knew more about what was going on in small-time crime than any man in the city.

"Miffy Conners," Satan was saying. "I want you to find out for me what he's been doing and what we can get on him."

"How far back?" asked Moffett.

"Oh, two years should be enough."

Moffett laughed. "That's easy, Satan," he said. "He's been up the river at Sing Sing for the last two years on a seven-year stretch. You are getting too big time to bother with little stuff, eh?"

"Thanks," said Satan, and hung up the phone. That was an odd one, he thought. But he made another call to check up on Nan Connors' father. He was right about him being out on the Coast. And out of trouble too. He called Moffett back. The sergeant said:

"His daughter Nan is sending him everything she can borrow and—"

"Steal," Satan finished.

"Steal then," said Moffett. "I thought maybe you wouldn't like it that way."

This time it was Moffett who hung up.

IT WAS past noon when Satan Hall stepped into the Police Commissioner's office, closed the door behind him and looked at the back of the bald head of the man who was facing the street and looking down upon it. Hall was used to being in that office, used to the quick smile and the ready handshake of the actual Commissioner of Police, used to the sudden profanity that might follow it, even a thorough castigation and the final demand: "Why did you do it?"

The ending was always the same—if it was right, if it was the law. If Satan stuck to his guns—politics were forgotten and the Commissioner stood behind him. Now Fogarty turned around and eyed Detective Hall sourly.

Fogarty did not have a bad face. Indeed, he had a good face. Fogarty must have been close to sixty and he had come up from a cop on the Force. His eyes were penetrating and hard and steady which was the cop in him, the effort each cop tries so hard to effect in the beginning, then keep, and which finally too often becomes a part of him. But Fogarty could smile too. He was smiling now. That was the politician in him. That was what had pushed him to the



Satan leaned out and brought his gun down hard on the man's head

top over the years.

"Sit down, Satan," he pointed at a chair, but stood standing as he was much the smaller man and he always leaned to the psychological idea that the superior advantage lay with the man who looked down upon the other.

Fogarty was a man who always came to the point. Satan was surprised that he didn't come to it now. They had not been friends, but then Satan had no friends. These two men had not been enemies either, and Satan had plenty of them both in and out of the Force. But he had always liked Fogarty and he thought that Fogarty liked him.

"It's bad business about the Commissioner," Fogarty said at length. "He was a fine man—is a fine man. And hang it all, I want to see him get better. I never expected this job, never thought I'd get it."

"And never wanted it." Satan looked up, his green eyes steady.

"We all want to be on the top," Fogarty told him. "I'd give my right arm to see the Commissioner back on the job. And will be glad if he does come back." And as Satan's thin slanting eyebrows lengthened, "He's in bad shape, Satan. Very bad." And after a moment's pause he came to the point quickly. "It isn't going to be so good for you, Satan."

"No," Satan said slowly, and indiplomatically added, "You can hardly be the man the Commissioner was."

Fogarty's eyes opened wide. Then he laughed.

"No, I can't," he said quite seriously. "No one else would have—could have kept you on with your indifference to politics, your shootings, your slapping down friends of the big boys, your stepping on the toes or even kicking the shins of those who make the machine work. For it is a machine, Satan. A machine with many cogs—where you are a single operating unit. I am part of that larger machine, one of its cogs, and those that make up the machine can make and break me—and you."

"The Commissioner didn't worry

about that," said Satan. "He had only one thing on his mind—his duty to the people, all the people—the little people."

Fogarty said, "The mayor who first appointed the Commissioner gave him his word that he could run the office as he pleased. The following mayor was more or less elected on his promise to keep the Commissioner on. The Commissioner has so well established himself with the people that no machine which hoped to stay in operation as a machine could grind him out." And suddenly and with a snap in his voice, "Certain things are not good for a cop—and you of all cops. There's a girl—Nan Connors—her father a crook. Her brother's a crook. Herself—she's been, more than once under suspicion at times. And I understand you are sweet on her."

Satan sat there and looked at him.

"Well," demanded Fogarty, "what do you say to that?"

"It's a quaint expression coming from you. 'Sweet on,'" was all Satan said.

Fogarty flushed. "I was repeating what I heard," he said hurriedly. "You have nothing to say?"

"Only that you should find something better than that, if you've been gotten to. I hope I'm wrong about that."

CHAPTER IV

Plain Speech



FOGARTY'S face turned a bright crimson and his black eyebrows drew together in a straight line. For a moment or two he glared at Satan Hall. Then by an effort he regained control of his temper, the color faded and the smile came back to his lips.

"You don't pull any punches, do you, Satan?" Fogarty looked down at him. "And what do you mean if I've been

gotten to? If you mean I should toss away my pension, my advancement, maybe my whole career so that you may go your own way playing a lone hand. Why everyone knew, everyone understood, even you must have—that when the Commissioner went, the days of doing as you please went with him. And at that the Commissioner didn't let you walk over everyone. I don't mean there isn't a place for you, Satan. Plenty of action for you. Enough vicious and violent crimes are being committed to satisfy even your lust for—for action. But everyone knew you always hated Otis Henley—" And when Satan half closed his eyes and his lips parted in what Fogarty felt must be a smile, "Well, you do hate him, don't you?"

"I suppose as you see hate, Fogarty, I hate all criminals. To me, then, the business of hunting the criminal must be the business of hate. It's a fight between the law and the lawless—and I don't think the law is holding its own. You know why Henley is down on the Avenue again, and in business again?"

"I guess it's the call of the city."

"The boy up from the gutter is going back into it again," Satan cut in. "Politicians give protection because they are asked to give it, when the one who asks it brings out the vote. There are too many shadows of the gutter around Otis Henley. He can't go any higher. He can't get his fingers in enough gravy. So now he's going to sell protection, and he's got to be down where he can meet those who need it and can pay the most. And they are not simply drunks and wayward sons of honest fathers. They are not simply the robbers of the poor and fake rackets to collect money. They are the vicious men of the night. Not honest gamblers, but crooked ones. They're killers, Fogarty, just as Henley is a killer."

"Henley was proved innocent, the only time he was tried," Fogarty snapped. "Found innocent by twelve honest and respected citizens."

"And a judge who was honest and re-

spectable, and a district attorney who took a vacation so an assistant could try the case," Satan sneered. "Witnesses that should have been clapped into jail. And he was acquitted through the death of an honest man who left a widow and orphans but couldn't be bought off but would tell the truth on the stand which he swore before God to tell."

"And what did the man who needed a killing want? He wanted to protect his fellow citizens against men like Otis Henley. He wanted to tell what he knew about Henley, and when the papers wouldn't print it, he stood on the corners and told what he knew. Other citizens put up money and he told in halls what he knew. And then the papers began to think there was something to it—so he died."

"Well—" Fogarty threw his arms apart as if in exasperation. "You can't do anything about that now?"

"Can't I?" Satan came to his feet. "Well, maybe not about that. But something else about Henley. You see, Fogarty, this was a little honest citizen. He wasn't of much importance for a long time. Then he was. He received threats. He was attacked twice. He knew his life wasn't worth much—but he tossed it away."

"Worse fool him," said Fogarty. "He didn't do any good."

"No." Satan shook his head. "He wasn't a fool from his way of thinking. He was thinking, you see, that if a hundred little guys talked as he did—and a thousand little guys talked as the hundred did—and a hundred thousand and a million began to think—then he'd have done something."

"Aw, rats!" said Fogarty. "Where did you get all that stuff? It doesn't sound like you."

"No, it doesn't. It wasn't me either. You see the little guy told me. His name was Francis Hannibal Jones. Not much of a name. Not over smart. But the country would be better for a lot more like him. He died and Otis Henley killed him. I'd face a hundred-to-

one odds for a gun against Henley."

"Come, come, Satan! Henley wouldn't step down from the gutter he came out of for small fry like that. Even the prosecution only tried to prove that he hired the job done."

HALL grinned at Fogarty and slowly shook his head.

"The prosecution," said Satan, "didn't try to prove anything. They were afraid. Call it politics if you want. I know you have to play politics to get up in the big jobs and the big money. You told me that once when I was working out of your precinct and you were a captain, and you clenched your hands and said, 'It's worth it, Hall. If it goes against your conscience at the time, remember that some day you will be big enough to throw off the cloak of hypocrisy and clean the city of its worst and most influential criminals.' Well, Fogarty, you're big enough now. Why don't you do it?"

"You mean give you the freedom to go out and shoot Henley to death? Is that it?" And when Satan said nothing, Fogarty leaned forward. "Well? Would you do it?"

"I'm not a murderer," Satan told him. "But given time and assistance—or simply time and the green light—I could put the finger on him for something else. His life belongs to the state. He's got to pay."

Fogarty sat down on the edge of the desk. "Somewhere along the line, you'd shoot him to death. Now if that—" Fogarty pounded the desk suddenly. "You can't work out of this office any longer, Satan. I haven't got the backing nor the authority of the Commissioner—nor the people behind me like that. I'm not dropping you from the Force, but you go back to being a patrolman tomorrow night—and the beat is out on Staten Island." And when Satan said nothing, "I wish to God the Commissioner were here now. You'll resign of course?"

"No." Satan said simply. "I'm just a

cop. I'll take the orders you give me. And I'll walk the beat."

"That is settled then," said Fogarty, and when Satan came to his feet and waited, spoke no word, gave no sign of complaint, Fogarty walked with him to the door. "You know, Satan," he said, "I'm making it as easy as possible for you—and—and—"

When he didn't finish his sentence and simply opened the door, Satan said softly:

"And you were out of the city when Henley was tried for murder. Good afternoon."

Fogarty stood as if stunned. He stood looking at the back of the tall wide shouldered man who passed down the hall with his easy, almost methodical yet nonchalant stride.

"There goes power," Fogarty thought, "a power that men fear. A sort of uncontrolled power. Now if that power could be disciplined—harnessed and used. . . ."

Fogarty shook his head as he went back into his office. He looked at the phone—someone would be waiting for a ring. Someone would be wanting to know if he had "disposed of the Hall situation." Yes. Fogarty bit his lips. Someone wouldn't be saying it, but someone would mean had he obeyed orders. Satan was right of course. You can stick your hands down into the mud just so many times. You can wash them so many times. But the time will come, the time must come, when there's no chance to wash them. And then it is too late, and the dirt sticks and grinds itself into your hands, and into your life.

Fogarty looked at his hands. Well, the time had come perhaps to wash the dirt from them forever. To have no further fears for his job or his pension or the wife and kids, even the grandchildren. He lifted the phone on the desk and called a number. When the answer came he said abruptly:

"He'll be walking a beat in Staten Island tomorrow night." Then he

slammed the phone down on its cradle. He looked at his hands again. They seemed just a trifle cleaner. Perhaps after all one wrong might make everything right. *Right* with former Chief Inspector Fogarty, now temporary Commissioner of the City of New York. And he told himself again he was doing it for the people. As Satan had said, "For the little people."

Satan stopped after the turn in the hall where he met the lanky, cadaverous Mason, the Commissioner's secretary for as long as he'd been in office. Mason blocked his passage.

"Broke?" Mason said.

"No." Satan looked at him. "Walking a beat." There was nothing of rancor in his voice or his words. "And you?"

Mason grinned. "He's got to keep me. The Commissioner kept things pretty close to his chest, and I was his chest." And after a moment's pause, "If I quit the job or threatened to, would it make any difference?"

MASON looked so earnest and angry that Satan had to suppress a desire to laugh.

"Not a good deal of difference," Satan told him. "Fogarty did what he had to do. Fundamentally he's a good cop. If you walked out on him, it would make it hard for the Department, and easy for a lot of crooks. If it's personal with you, why it would bust Fogarty, I guess. But the next guy might be worse—a lot worse."

"And what about Henley?" Mason put those sunken eyes on Satan. "The Commissioner was set against him. He's a real menace to the city, Satan. Henley's got friends who'll listen to him." And with a touch of viciousness Satan had never suspected, the quiet Mason said, "And I think he's got something on Fogarty!"

"Everybody's got something on someone," Satan told him. "Otherwise we'd rid the city of criminals in a week. How's the Big Boss?"

Mason frowned.

"He's bad, Satan. Very bad. I was down there this afternoon. The doctors say he's got a week or ten days—to hang on. He didn't know me at first. Then he did. I guess he doesn't know the truth, Satan. He said for you to carry on, that he'll be coming along all right."

"He did?" Satan's chin went up. "Then he knows, Mason. He always knows."

Mason shook his head.

"Take care of yourself, Satan. It'll get around fast—and the boys—Well, they won't have the same respect, the same fear, when—well, they'll look at it as if you had the skids under you. I'd stay home tonight. Keep away from the bright lights."

"I've got the night off," Satan told him. "I haven't been assigned to duty yet, and I haven't a uniform." He stretched and yawned as he put solemn green eyes on Mason. "I'll take it easy. I'll be spending the evening up at the One Thousand Club. I hear they have a good floor show." And when Mason looked at him hard, "And if they haven't, I'll make one."

"Careful, Satan!" Mason grabbed him by the arm. "Charlie Hanlon is cold steel. And bad. He'd put a bullet in your back. As for Henley. Well, he was one of the best and quickest shots along the Avenue a few years back. He keeps in practise now up at the Sportsman's Club. They say he shoots spots out of cards."

"I'll bring him a pack of cards then." Satan grinned and when Mason opened his mouth to talk, "Listen, Mason. They won't be talking up at the One Thousand Club tonight like you think. If Hanlon does, I'll knock him around like any second-rate punk."

"And Henley?"

"Henley I'm afraid is too slick and too smart. But Hanlon is rough and ready." Satan smacked his lips. "It will be my final bow. Give the boys something to talk about, and maybe remem-

ber on lonely winter nights when I'm out on Staten Island. Be seeing you tomorrow when I come in for Fogarty's orders."

Bill Mason too watched the broad shoulders go down toward the elevators. He took a step or two after him, hesitated and shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned and went down to his office, the door below the private office of the Commissioner of Police temporarily—he hoped—John J. Fogarty.

CHAPTER V

Not According to Plan



HENLEY sat at his big desk and looked at Charlie Hanlon. He smiled pleasantly as usual.

"I think you are wrong, Charlie," he said slowly. "I wish the girl hadn't gone with him. I wished I had seen my way clear to prevent it." And when Hanlon's eyes came up, "Oh, she returned all right. It isn't my fear of losing the girl. It's that I don't believe we can set a trap for him with the girl as bait."

Charlie Hanlon snapped his lips. "Give me the girl, Boss. I'll bait the trap."

"It isn't the baiting of the trap," Henley shook his head. "It's Satan Hall. He doesn't think that much of the girl."

"What! A dame like Conners? Nan Conners? Why any guy'd fall for her!"

"But Satan Hall is not any guy. I started the rumor that he was leaving her in the lurch. Satan sticks to the guys who stool for him. That made him come."

"She stooled for him?"

"No," said Henley, "I don't believe that. Sometimes she loves him and sometimes she hates him—I think. And don't give me that knowing look. It is the way of women like the Conners girl.

If you catch her on the hate side, then she'd set Satan up for a quick knock-over. If you caught her on the love side, you might be digging your own grave."

"The answer," said Hanlon, "is to catch her on the hate side. She did come back."

"You're a great man for action, Hanlon, and you have an instinct for knowing when trouble is coming, but that hate and love racket is not something you can count on. It comes and it goes with lightning quick changes. Women are unpredictable, and Nan Conners is the most unpredictable of all." And suddenly, "Don't you know how I keep her here?"

"Something on Satan? You could expose if she left?"

"No!" Henley for once was impassioned. "If I had anything on Satan, or if anyone else had, it would have been buried in his back long ago."

"Well—her old man then." And when Henley shook his head, "On Nan, of course."

"I suppose it could be that." Henley smiled. "But you don't know Nan. You're my best and closest, maybe my only real friend. I always had everything I wanted, Hanlon. You know why I'm back here on Broadway? It won't be politics now that will get the boys what they want. They'll pay cash for it and I'll use the politics—not overdo it, you know. Just one thing stands in my way."

"Satan Hall?"

"Physically, yes. He is a real danger to the entire scheme. Because he knows it. But I've shoved him out in the sticks. He'll stay there so long, he'll quit. If he doesn't, he'll get soft and one of the boys can knock him over any night. If the Commissioner gets well—or it even looks like it—why—" He shrugged. "Anyway—" He put his hand on Hanlon's shoulder. "You're to be the big lad in this racket. It'll be known around that if you are in trouble, you have to see Hanlon. I won't meet them, won't

talk to them. You'll tell me, collect the dough, and I'll do the fix." And after a moment's hesitation, "I'll see the big boys, of course."

"Of course." Hanlon twisted up his lips. "And the other angle—the mental one?"

"It's the girl, Charlie—the girl." Henley came to his feet and started pacing the room. "Laugh, if you want. I'm forty-one and I'm crazy about her. It's got me as simple as a kid!"

"Yeah?" Hanlon showed surprise. And then, "Well, you've got her. Why don't you take her?"

"Because I'm a fool! A blubbering idiot! Don't you understand? I love this girl. I want her to feel the same about me. She did once. She was sixteen. Beginning to dance, beginning really to develop. But the stamp of the underworld was on her. Her father a bum crook, used to be a high class forger but not any more. Just a common crook.

"I put her into a revue and she thought I was the only man in New York. I was going to marry her, I wanted to marry her, but Sydney Mercer talked me out of that. It must be someone on the top, he said. I was the coming big boy. I needed class if I married anyone. She'd drag me down. And—I tossed her over. Or I thought I did. But I never got her out of my mind."

CHARLIE HANLON'S eyes widened with surprise. He didn't often show emotion.

"So she tossed up her big chance on Broadway with Nestor, the Magician, to come here in the chorus."

"Yes!" Henley snapped the word out hard. "I knew Nestor was trying to raise the dough. Well, I pushed it until things were set and then I dropped from under. Just like that, I called it off. She's ambitious. Also she's smart. She found out. Nestor never did. I just had a guy run in on him and tell him they were afraid to touch it with

her past. She came here and I made her a proposition. In the chorus in my place—for three months. She'd see me so much. At the end of that time, I'd throw the dough into the show, no strings on it. She grinned at me and I grinned at her, and we made the bargain. Time's up this week."

"And you were a sap."

"So far, that's right. But she loved me once. Why not again? Sometimes I'd build up the line that Satan never gave a hoot what happened to her. Sometimes she'd fall for it, sometimes she'd laugh at me. And then I started a rumor and got him to come. I was sure he didn't give a rap. He didn't. She's a straight enough kid. She told me that. I showed her my power today. I got Satan broke. She said nothing, but she's discussing the Nestor show with me, and telling me I'll make money."

"You know your business, boss." Hanlon shrugged his shoulders. "If it was me, I'd talk turkey with her. In your position you can make the city too hot to hold her. You should be able to get something on her—easy."

"Yes." Henley agreed with a smile, but this time his smile was not pleasant. "You see there was a guy asked her to marry him once. He changed his mind. He was up in her apartment, an apartment his money furnished through her father, but she didn't know that. Well, he made a couple of mistakes, after telling her marrying her would hurt his business. He was pretty sure of the girl. He was more sure of himself. He didn't ask. He didn't beg. He told her what was what. And he grabbed her and—"

"And what?" asked Hanlon.

"Well, she gets out of strait jackets and bound boxes as well as Houdini. She is faster with her hands than any living human being, according to Nestor. That night she demonstrated it. She got out of his grasp, turned to a drawer, jerked out a gun and shot him straight in the chest twice."

"He—he died?"

"No. He lived."

"But you could make something out of that, boss."

"I wouldn't want to make anything out of that. It would make the man look like a fool if I could."

"What do you care?"

"You see," said Henley, "I was the man."

"Huh!" said Hanlon. "For the smartest man in the city you sure get yourself in some jams. Why don't you wring her neck and be done with it?"

To Hanlon's surprise Henley leaned on the desk. There was no smile there now. His face was set and grim.

"If it's Satan Hall," he said slowly, "I will—"

"That's better." Hanlon nodded his head and seemed contented for the first time. "If any dame could take my gun from me, I'd be willing to die for keeps by the rod." And with a shrug, "Here's an envelope I found back of your safe, sealed, but with your name on it. Something you forgot to look over. Better take a peep at it."

"I will," said Henley, carelessly picking up the envelope and eying it. "Looks like something Nan made up for me. She's good at putting things together too."

LATER Charlie Hanlon sat in the booth and talked earnestly to the two men across from him. It was early, and few people were at the bar.

"Look," he said, "you two men have nothing to worry about. You don't have to shoot at Satan. You don't even have to talk to him. I'm at the bar, see? It's just routine stuff."

"Listen, Charlie," the biggest of the two men said. "There has been a price on Satan Hall's head for a long time. I'll lay you even money that a guy could walk up and down Broadway tonight and within an hour get ten grand ready to be laid on the line if he came back with the report that he had knocked Satan over—and that even with the gen-

eral knowledge that Satan's been broke."

"But you have nothing to do," Hanlon protested with real feeling. "I make a remark about a dumb cop, and something about the girl, and he turns."

"We've seen it tried before," said the smaller man. "It's been planned out to the least detail by men who never missed. They know it's coming. They know it in detail and plan it in detail. When Satan slaps a lad down, it ruins him on the Avenue. It laughs him right out of things. It ain't funny to the lad who gets it. You never saw it. It goes like this. He walks into the bar. He smacks his man alongside the cheek with his open left hand. That knocks him to his right. Then Satan slaps him with his open right hand. That knocks him back into position again."

"And there," said the big man, "is where the wise guy or the fool or the boy with a temper does it. He reaches for his gun, jerks it out, and before he can press the trigger Satan draws, shoots and kills him. Self-defense, see? He's done it. I saw—"

The smaller man cut in there: "If the man feels like living and don't pull a gun, then the last stage comes. Satan gives him time to make up his mind—then his right hand comes up and clips him under the button, and it lays him out cold. It's old stuff with Satan. It works either way. You're laughed off the Avenue, or you're dead."

Charlie Hanlon's little hard eyes grew cold.

The little man added hastily: "I ain't saying someone won't dump him over some day. I ain't saying you ain't the one to do it. But I'm saying I don't want no part of it. It's Satan's game, not yours. The rodman who gets Satan will get him his way, not Satan's way."

"My way is Satan's way," said Hanlon. "I want it to look right to the boys, to the papers, to the courts. I'm not a sap. I've studied out his method. Listen to this: He passes by, I crack wise, he turns back and starts to slap me down. I don't reach for any gun. And

why? Because the gun is already in my hand and my hand is in my pocket. I simply plug him through my pocket."

"That's smart, Charlie," the small man exclaimed in admiration.

"Right," said the big man. "It's fool-proof! Absolutely fool-proof. You get him on his first slap, but he draws and shoots and kills in a second."

"Baloney!" said the little man. "Satan won't draw no gun. Charlie won't even be reaching. He'll just be shooting. You're right, Charlie. This is the wind-up."

"Sure, sure," Charlie said. "I figured it out myself. He was tough with me this afternoon. That's where I need you two."

"But you don't need us. You—"

"Listen!" Charlie Hanlon pounded the table. "You don't have to do anything but holler. I'm a stranger in town, see? When he first slaps me, you two holler out together, 'Look out, Charlie! Satan's got a gun!' That's all. That's all. It sounds good in the papers and will clear me in court."

"Couldn't Eddie behind the bar do that?" the tall man put in.

"No." Charlie was emphatic. "Fellows will be yelling at him for drinks. You two simply stand against the booth there. I don't want you for witnesses after it's over. You mugs wouldn't do anyone any good. It's the honest boys, the business men, the playboys. They'll all testify that several people hollered 'Satan's got a gun.' They might even holler it too, when they hear you. Anyway a lot of lads will swear about seeing the gun—it's just a matter of form."

THE tall and the short man looked at each other and nodded. Finishing their drinks they said in unison:

"Okay, Charlie," and got up to leave. They didn't leave right away. They had to listen to the instructions over again, three more times. They didn't like it. But when they went back to the bar, they agreed with each other that Charlie Hanlon was a careful man, and a smart

man, but neither one of them expressed any envy that he hadn't thought of it first. Nor did either one of them wish for the opportunity to carry out Charlie's plans.

Satan walked into the bar shortly after the theatres let out and perhaps twenty minutes before the show would go on at the club. He didn't stop for a drink.

He elbowed his way through the crowd. The tall and the short man stiffened and looked over at Charlie Hanlon. His right hand was sunk deep in his jacket pocket, his left hand toyed with a glass. He was leaning easily against the bar. He didn't seem nervous or excited, just watchful as he always was.

His hard little eyes glittered as he watched Satan come nearer and nearer, and his thin red lips parted. His whole expression might have been a derisive grin. As Satan came alongside of him, he leaned over and said loud enough for a dozen or more along the bar to hear:

"That's Hall, the dick who got busted today. I fixed that up. See how he slips by."

Satan stopped suddenly, turned and swung back and faced Charlie Hanlon in what seemed one single motion.

"Charlie Hanlon," he said, "you couldn't fix a fly in a beer glass. Don't kid the boys."

The men around who knew Satan were surprised at his voice. It seemed amused more than angry. His teeth parted but his green eyes remained the same. They wondered if he had smiled.

Hanlon straightened slightly. His hand tightened on the gun in his pocket. His finger caressed the trigger.

"No dame will want a busted copper," he said easily. "The boys were wondering if you'd come sneaking around." And when Satan looked at him Hanlon tossed it all in. He knew now he would have to kill Satan. He said, "Yep, the redhead on the end. Nan Connors, Satan's girl, and—"

Satan's left hand came up palm open. Men nodded along the bar. Men who had seen it before, or heard about it. Satan was going to slap Hanlon down, and they knew too that Hanlon at the last minute would go yellow and take it all the way through and be laughed off the Avenue. Or he would draw a gun and, well—yes, die.

Hanlon watched the hand and grinned. He knew too. There would be the slap with the left hand and then with the right. Well, he didn't have to draw and close his finger and fire. His gun was slightly raised. He had but to press the trigger. He'd do it after the left hand struck and before the right hand came over. He watched Satan's left hand and his lips were an evil sneer.

And things suddenly exploded in Hanlon's head. He felt as if his head had been jerked clean off his neck. That is all he did feel—and then blackness.

CHAPTER VI

Demand Date



BUT if Hanlon did not know what happened, others did. At least a dozen men had seen Satan's right hand close into a fist and shoot out. They heard it crack Hanlon's chin too and saw the man leave the ground. They knew that he struck the bar, and there were some who said he stood directly on his head. But that was not so. He sort of folded over and hit the floor with the back of his skull and lay there like a Japanese vaudeville juggler doing a particularly difficult trick with a barrel.

The tall man and the short man holered it out together.

"He's got a gun," they cried.

"Thanks, palsies!" Satan nodded at the two stooges. "I knew it from the way he held his right hand. And I don't slap common punks around. Look

at him now." The men looked down at the twisted heap of relaxed and entirely unconscious flesh. Just before he turned away, Satan said, "And I couldn't shoot him either. Why, the city would take the price of the lead off my expense account." And glaring over the bar, "Come on, one of you guys!" He hollered at the bartenders. "Get this guy on his feet! Here. I'll straighten him out for you."

Satan did straighten the man out. He straightened him out by the simple process of putting his right foot under his chin and dragging the unconscious man full length out on the floor. Satan took one look back at the little crowd that was gathering around the inert Hanlon. Then he walked down the length of the bar, turned right and went down a small hallway. No one stopped him as he swung left and mounted the three steps that led backstage. A man had his back to him. He was speaking into a small house phone beside a door which said **STAGE ENTRANCE—NO ADMITTANCE**. He was saying:

"Yes, boss. Yes. No one else. Oh—Satan Hall." The man's voice did not register the reassurance he meant it to register, but he added, "All right. I'll watch for you." He put down the phone, shoved his right hand under his left armpit and turned around and faced Satan.

"A man doesn't carry his handkerchief under his left arm," Satan said, both his hands hanging easily by his side. And as the man jerked out his right hand empty, "There, that's better." He pushed by the trembling man, tried the door and, finding it unlocked, opened it and pushing through, closed the door behind him.

The One Thousand Club stage was not very deep, therefore the accommodations for the entertainers were limited. It was almost time for the show and there was a good deal of confusion. Satan knew that the girls would be bunched together but, since Mitzie Mayflower was billed as the attraction, he

felt sure she would have a dressing room to herself, even if the others had to stand on one another's shoulders to make up.

Her door was there all right. Mitzie was not as young as she used to be, couldn't dance as well, couldn't sing as well, but her repartee had grown better over the years. As her acquaintance among the night life grew, she knew how to kid the cash customers. She knew their weakness and their strength, their secrets too. But she made friends, not enemies—at least she never tossed the wrong words to the right customers.

Satan found the door all right, with the great silver star on it that Mitzie had affected for the last decade.

Then he spotted the redhead, Nan Connors. She was standing close to a bunch of other girls and was in tights. Satan frowned, bumped into a couple of stage-hands and an excited little man who was giving orders, and reached Nan. No one noticed him, or no one cared. Without a word he pulled Nan by the wrist back to the door with the star on it. Then he shoved it open and pushed her inside.

MITZIE MAYFLOWER, in her tight fitting white evening gown, turned from the mirror where she was finishing her makeup. The three of them were crowded in the tiny space. Mitzie perhaps had room to get up without mussing her outfit.

"Holy cow!" Her face hardened. "The next thing will be a Great Dane as a pet. I told you—I—you're Hall! Satan Hall!"

"That's right, Mitzie," Satan said easily. "I want to talk to this young lady in private. I knew you wouldn't mind." And when the laughing but shrewd eyes watched him, "There's no use of the whole city being in on it, and hurting your show."

Mitzie came to her feet and with great difficulty pushed around him.

"If it's a pinch," she said, "and I mean pinch in a legal way, you wouldn't let

me in for trouble, would you, Satan darling?"

"It's okay, Mitzie," he said. "Don't say anything outside. Nothing will come of it."

"All right, Satan." She pinched his cheek. "You're one cop who never bothered my act. Hanged if you didn't do me a good turn once, though I can't remember what it was." And as she opened the door, "Don't trust him too much at that, Red." She paused and looked at Nan Connors as if she had seen her for the first time. "He's so straight he would go out of his way to aid an honest person. The only trouble is there are so few honest people. Listen to him, Red, but if he wants answers, get a lawyer." And she was gone, slipping sideways out the door and closing it behind her.

Satan said abruptly, "It's like this, Nan. Do you intend to stay here no matter what I say? Yes or no."

"Yes."

"Then you are to come out and have supper with me between shows. I'll be walking a beat tomorrow night and won't be able to keep an eye on you."

"That's white of you." She was rather stiff. "You didn't quit then." And not quite so stiff, "I think Henley was afraid you would and open up your own agency, get some public minded citizen behind you and break up his racket. That's why he didn't put the heat on to have you dropped."

"I never thought of that." Satan's green eyes widened. "He's got brains! But I wouldn't want it that way." And indifferently, "I knocked Hanlon around a bit tonight out at the bar. I put some strength in the wallop. I think people will be leaving you alone."

She put her eyes straight on him. "Did you ever think that I can take care of myself—did for a long time before. I met you. I don't need you!"

"I wasn't thinking of you," Satan said slowly. "I was thinking of myself. That is, of myself in relation to the job I have. I've built up a reputation. It

was a hard long job, besides six months in the hospital at different times. That was before gunners began to shake just before they shot. Somehow they think you saved my life." And after a pause, "Maybe you did, but you got a guy killed doing it, a guy you wanted dead very much."

"Satan," she said slowly, "do you believe that? Or do you think I wanted more that you should live?"

"You could easily tell yourself that, Nan. And believe it too."

"I told you—" she started, and then stopped. "Well, I won't tell you now because I don't know if it is true or not. But others think it was because I loved you."

Satan nodded gravely. "Don't mind that, Nan," he said. "More than one has hinted that I was sweet on you. I think that was the way it was put." He looked behind her and into space. "If the Avenue believes that, you'd sure be sitting pretty."

"Well," she said with irony, "since you're so solicitous about my welfare, why not let them believe that?"

THE detective shook his head. "I wouldn't be sitting so pretty then, Nan."

"So? Well, you can sit with yourself out front tonight. I won't be joining you and I don't—"

The door opened suddenly. Otis Henley stood there. He was smiling.

"Breaking the rules, Satan?" he said in mock severity. "Not that I mind personally but the rest of the cast won't like it. And I understand Miss Conners won't be joining you. Was that for another walk?"

"It was out front," Nan Conners told Henley. "And this time, Otis, I mean it. Agreement or no agreement, if you drive me out to sit with that man—I quit!"

"Really?" Henley let his eyebrows go up but there was no other expression on his face. "I guess that settled it then, Hall."

"She'll join me out front," Satan said. "I'm afraid you'll find it awfully crowded. Commissioner Fogarty is coming here tonight. I invited him only a few minutes ago. Oh, nothing official, I hope. You heard what Miss Conners said."

"She'll join me between shows," Satan nodded, and when Henley would have spoken, "If not, Henley, you won't like it." And after he pushed by Henley and stood at the door, "I hope your head waiter will be courteous tonight." And when Henley looked puzzled, "Hanlon wasn't, you know. Or do you know?"

Satan turned and was gone.

CHAPTER VII

Mason's Warning



OUT in front Satan got a table all right, well to the back on the side, but that was because he wanted it there. He thought to himself of the cleverness of Henley and, perhaps, of the embarrassment of Fogarty. The real Commissioner often

visited around night clubs, sometimes for what he might learn, but sometimes for simple relaxation. But Fogarty was visiting Henley on his first night as Acting Commissioner. That wouldn't be bad for Henley, and Henley would certainly capitalize on it.

Fogarty, of course, could hardly beg off. Henley had made a direct request. Satan was bothering them, and Satan still worked out of the Commissioner's office. Henley could ignore the Hanlon affair. That was a little rough, a little rough on Hanlon's part.

But Fogarty couldn't ignore the back stage trouble. Satan had forced his way back-stage. And to put it mildly he had created a disturbance. He tried to think now if there was any threat in his words. Just "You won't like it." No, there

wasn't a definite threat there. That is, not definite to anyone but Henley.

Satan's thoughts stopped. Fogarty was coming across the room to him just as the music started and the floor show began. Fogarty pulled out a chair, sat down and said without preliminary:

"Okay, Satan, beat it! You are not wanted here."

"By whom?" Satan asked him bluntly.

"By me, for one," Fogarty said. His eyes were set hard now. His ruddy face was ruddier, maybe slightly red, Satan thought. "By me, for one," Fogarty repeated, and this time added, "Isn't that enough?"

"No." Satan didn't move. "That is not enough. That the whole Force don't want me here. That every politician in the city doesn't want me here. That Henley and his cheap thugs don't want me here. It's not enough. There is a dying man who wants me here."

"Come, come, Satan!" said Fogarty, and he tried to make his voice both friendly and stern. "I'm doing the best I can for you. Sitting there disobeying orders—threatening Henley in his own club."

"I have had no official orders," Satan said. "We simply discussed things this afternoon. And I made no actual threat to Henley."

"No?" Fogarty raised those thick gray black eyebrows. "Enough of them back stage heard you call for a show-down with Henley. You told him the girl would come out here to see you between shows, or you'd slap him down the first time you saw him. No use to deny it. Maybe you didn't use those words but that's what's going around already. You couldn't have meant anything else. Well, what did you mean?"

"Just that then!" Satan said sharply. "I want to have things to remember out on Staten Island."

"Well, you won't have that. Big-time racketeers and small-time politicians, yes, but not a man of Henley's status in this city."

"He won't have any status," Satan

said. "None of them have. Ridicule is something no one can stand, and when the job is done he doesn't have any friends. A man who takes a slapping around before others—is not considered much of a man."

"And if he don't take it?"

Satan raised those green eyes and looked straight at Fogarty.

"If he pulls a gun." Fogarty pushed it. "If he shoots? Just that, Satan. What if he doesn't take it?"

"Dead men don't have any friends either," said Satan. And when Fogarty's eyes grew wide and round and staring, "You never heard of pull or politics taking a slug out of a man's chest and putting it back in the gun it came from."

"Satan," Fogarty said quite seriously, "are you telling me that you intend to kill this man—kill Henley?"

Satan said slowly, "I am telling you that I intend to defend my life against any man who draws a gun on me, and to shoot to kill certainly if it is a man with the reputation Henley has with using a gun."

THE Acting Commissioner rubbed his chin and looked more uncomfortable than ever.

"Well," said Fogarty, "we'll have you out in the sticks tomorrow night, where you can't harm yourself." He shook his head. "But tonight's work may not make the sticks safe for you, Satan. I know Henley better than you do. He's all for smoothing things over but he's even more for his prestige. He can't then, and he won't produce the girl here, with you between shows."

"That," said Satan, "is not a bad idea."

"Nor will he," went on the commissioner, "put himself in a position to be slapped down." And when Satan would have spoken, "And you won't be in a position to slap him down if you're dead."

"So," Satan spoke softly. "You think he'll sic a bunch of his thugs on me?"

"No—no!" Fogarty said quickly. "I'm quite sure Henley would never do a

thing like that."

"That's right," Satan agreed and he smacked his lips. "He was always known in the old days to do his own killing."

"Good grief!" said Fogarty in a shocked voice. "What an idea to have about a man like Henley! Otis Henley. Okay, Satan. Have your fun tonight. Otis Henley has left the place with a Miss Connors."

And when Satan stared at him, "Your trouble, Satan, is that you are too smug. You start too many things you can't finish." And with a shrug, "Otis Henley is quite evidently one of them. I'll be glad to see you pounding a beat, safe from the smart boys. Good night."

And Fogarty was right. Nan Connors did not appear on the stage that night. Henley was not seen around by anyone. At about one o'clock Satan left the club and went home. He didn't have many thoughts, perhaps just one.

Fogarty had never mentioned anything about Hanlon. That is, anything worth while. But mostly Satan thought what a fine thing it would be if he could tell the Commissioner, the real Commissioner, that Otis Henley wouldn't bother the city any more. Satan thought also that if the Commissioner had had any idea that his operation was the least bit dangerous, he would have waited to direct the campaign against Henley.

When Satan entered his small apartment that night, he found Mason, the Commissioner's secretary, sitting in his easy chair. Mason said at once.

"I used the Commissioner's key, Satan. He gave it to me. He trusts me absolutely." And seeing the steady glint in Satan's eyes, "So you don't?"

"I don't trust anyone implicitly, Mason, unless it is the Commissioner." He added without rancor, "Give me that key."

Mason put the cane he held between his knees aside and, taking out a key ring, detached a key and tossed it over to Satan.

"I wanted to see you alone," he explained simply. "Just as the Commissioner does at times. I didn't want to wait in the hall. I didn't know when you'd come in, if ever, after the little display you put on at the One Thousand Club."

"You don't need to explain further," Satan cut in. "I suppose you wish to warn me that I am in danger of my life."

Mason smiled. "I don't think there has been a minute in the last five years that the Commissioner and I didn't think you were in danger of your life. We got used to that."

"You have seen the Commissioner? Tonight?"

"Yes." Mason looked very grave. "A crisis in perhaps twenty-four hours, but they hold out little hope."

"They won't let me in." Satan seemed to think his own words over a moment. "At least they think it is best he doesn't see anyone. I've been weighing that little idea and wondering if I should see him."

"No." Mason was emphatic. "You'd have to make a scene to do it. You see, there are some things I must arrange for him. I'm a lawyer too, you know."

"That wasn't what you came to tell me, was it?"

MASON ran his fingers over the head of his cane. "No. I wanted to ask the Commissioner about—if I should tell you something or not, but he's not quite himself. He spoke about you, Satan. And Henley. It's bothering him. Well, I've come. So here it is. Your first beat as a cop will not be Staten Island. It will be up Riverdale way—Riverdale Avenue."

"Go on," Satan said.

"Well, Mercer—Sydney Mercer—has a place up there. He gave the servants a vacation a couple of days ago. He has been stopping at a hotel with his family and left for Europe tonight. Do you read anything in that?"

"Only that Mercer always seems to

get from under when anything big is going to break in the city." He shook his head a minute. "I can't think of anything big. Can you?"

"Well—your death, Satan."

"You flatter me," said Satan. "Mercer pulls strings, helps out the boys, gets out the vote—is nothing but a politician. He wouldn't order a murder and wouldn't be behind one."

"But Mercer has intuition. Henley fears and hates you. Mercer had Fogarty appointed. Fogarty is not especially his man. Then Henley must have said he could be controlled, and Henley controls no one through friendship or prestige—only politics and fear. Your death—"

"Rot!" said Satan. "I suppose I should appreciate your visit, Mason, and your warning, but at that I don't understand it. There are a hundred guys who want to kill me right now. Yes. I know none of them are as big as Henley."

"I simply wanted to tell you that Mercer, when he went away, turned his house over to Floyd Johnson, and Johnson, not being able to use it at the time, is letting Otis Henley use it. Mercer would hardly be so familiar with Henley, but the point is that you are to patrol up by the house that Henley may be occupying. Good night, Satan."

Satan stopped Mason. "Just a minute! How did you learn about this? Fogarty tell you?"

"Not exactly. You see Acting Commissioner Fogarty left a notation, more of a memorandum for himself, under some papers on his desk; that he was to call my attention to it just before you went on duty."

"Fogarty." Satan stood there with feet far apart and unconsciously blocking the secretary's exit. "Fogarty wouldn't—at the instigation of Henley—let me into a—well you don't believe that?"

"My dear Satan." Mason tossed his cane lightly over his arm. "I simply came here to disclose a few facts to you."

"You don't think—you don't think

that Henley would—or could—threaten Fogarty into an action like that?"

"If you want simply my personal opinion, I think that any man would be a fool to attempt to threaten Fogarty into anything. He's the smartest man—and yes, the best politician and the slickest cop on the New York Police force. I don't think there would be any man that I would be least likely to threaten." And with a bow as he opened the door, "Unless of course it was you, Satan. Good night."

CHAPTER VIII

Guns, and a Chain!



WHEN Satan walked into the uptown precinct exactly at midnight, he was slightly surprised to see Sergeant Heathcote sitting behind the desk. In a way he supposed they might be old enemies, though he hadn't given Heathcote much thought or paid much attention to him over the years.

Sergeant Heathcote said stiffly, "You should have come earlier for your orders. You should be out on the beat now. Understand, Hall? Patrolman Hall. This is no soft berth. You will report hereafter in time to get your instructions. Now it is not my idea to reprimand you on your first appearance. It's a blow to you, of course, but everyone else," he waved around at the three cops who sat in one corner, "has seen it coming."

"Stow the talk," Satan cut in sharply.

"What?" said the sergeant, rising. "Did I understand you to say?"

"I said 'stop talking.'" Satan went close to the desk and leaned on it.

The sergeant held his ground. He gave a little but he felt that he held his ground. He looked over at the three policemen, grew stiffer.

"Be careful, Hall," his voice raised slightly. "Don't make a bad start with me, or—" He leaned slightly forward. "Things are different now."

"No." Satan looked straight at him. "Things are not any different. I never took any guff from you when I worked under Captain Fogarty. I won't take any from you now. Let us presume then that I'm here to clean up the Rafferty mess."

Sergeant Heathcote didn't like that. The Rafferty mess was his particular problem. Contrary to general opinion there was nothing in it for him but a headache. Civics society demanded that the gambling house be closed. It wasn't big enough for the huge daily papers or the Department to holler much about, but it was big enough for Rafferty to make trouble, if Heathcote made trouble. He had only tried to make it less obnoxious by getting it under cover. He was a reasonable man. Those drunken gatherings on the streets early in the morning were entirely unnecessary.

He didn't say anything then. He came down from the desk, muttered about giving Satan some private orders and preceded Satan into the little room behind the desk.

"Now look, boy," he said as soon as he had closed the door, "you've stepped on important toes for years and sort of trod me down. But you've been turned over to me in this little two-by-four joint. And why? Because I don't think there's a man who wants you. Who wouldn't resign first. Now you're not coming up here to raise Cain, are you?"

"I walked out of the tenderloin, didn't I?" Satan asked him. "I'll walk out of here too."

"Well," the sergeant stroked his chin, "if you were to bust up the Rafferty Brothers, small fry to you, and I wasn't to know it until after it was done, what could I do?"

"I don't know," said Satan. "What could you do?"

"You're a hard man." The sergeant

shrugged his shoulders, then leaned over and opened a drawer and took a torn envelope out of his desk. "Memorandum for you, Satan. Came over the phone." He read aloud: "'For your new patrolman.' That has to be you. 'His girl will be getting married before morning—if she likes it or not—if he likes it or not.'" And as Satan grabbed the paper and read it, "Now that couldn't be—"

But Satan was gone. Out through the door of the private room. Out through the main door of the little building. With the sergeant having presence of mind enough in front of the three cops to call after him:

"Now that's better, Hall. When I give orders, I want action."

But Satan neither saw nor heard any of this.

He picked up his car down the block, swung it around as if it were a jeep and started straight off for Riverdale Avenue. He didn't stop when he reached the gates of the Mercer estate. They were open. He roared right through and, as a voice hailed him, he ran into a heavy log across two wooden horses.

A MAN came out of the little gate house. His shoulders lowered slightly as he bent toward the open window of the car. Then he stuck his head and arm through. The hand attached to that arm held a gun.

"Come, come!" the man said good naturedly enough, "We haven't any key to the gate." And as his other hand produced a torch he breathed half aloud, "Hall—Satan Hall."

That was all he said or did. Satan had leaned over and brought his gun down on the man's head. He was about to push him away from the car but found that unnecessary. The body gave slowly. Head and shoulders left the window, then the arms followed, the right hand still gripping the gun, the torch on the floor of Satan's car.

Satan slid back behind the wheel. He let the headlights go full on for a moment, then jumping the car forward

in low gear he shot around the wooden horse to the left, plowed up a flower bed, felt his wheels catch, stick, start, start to stall, and then the car jumped forward again—onto the gravel road winding down to the house.

He didn't know how many people were there. He didn't particularly care. He knew now where the girl was. He knew that Henley had taken her out of the One Thousand Club and in doing so set himself up as her guardian of safety. Maybe the politicians could knock the props from under him as an officer of the law, but no one could knock the props from under him as Satan Hall. It was a reputation that he had built for himself, a reputation that had taken years to establish—to make a gun shake in a killer's hands.

He spotted the house in the dull light of the moon; drove his car off on the smooth turf as silken as a putting green; jerked on the brake and got out a gun in either hand. This was it.

His name would be back on the Avenue stronger than ever. The papers would carry it, the editorial might even demand his return to his former active position. He had law and order behind him. The girl was being held a prisoner against her will. That was called kidnapping. He'd make headlines now. Dead or alive.

Satan felt that he stepped on beds perhaps of rare flowers, but he knew that he bent low and that he went quickly and kept in the shadow of bushes or flowers or trees, and once a small hedge, anything that gave him protection as he hurried toward the big fieldstone house.

He didn't pause to examine the house carefully until he was within fifty feet of it. Then he couldn't be sure if there was a light in it or not. At least no lights shone through the windows on the first, second or third stories.

But some of the windows near the front of the house were very black indeed, while the others near the rear had a strange dull darkness. He knew what

that meant. The dull windows had no curtains before them. The black windows were carefully shaded. So if there were any lights they would be behind those dead patches of absolute blackness.

Satan saw a light. At least he thought that he did. It had come from the rear of the house, as if a flash had, for a moment, stretched out almost brilliantly on the grass. Not a flashlight—more as if a door had opened and closed.

Satan nodded grimly, moved close to the shadow of the house now and around toward the back. Perhaps a guard had slipped out to look around, join another. Perhaps the rounds were made every so often. Perhaps—And Satan turned the corner of the house and saw the light and the man at about the same time. The man was leaning just below a small open window, neither looking in or out, Satan thought. He seemed deep in thought a moment. Then he reached up to pull the window down, and that was Satan's cue.

Three steps he took, pulled the man from the window, and struck almost in a single motion. The man sank to the ground.

Satan muttered half aloud, "Too bad, but it's a rough game tonight, brother."

"Very rough," said a voice behind Satan. And that was all. Satan wasn't sure even that a voice had spoken. The words seemed to ring in his head, ring in his head as he started to climb slowly to his knees. Then he knew. Knew before the voice went on speaking.

"One skull is the same as another," Charlie Hanlon said behind him. "Get up, tough guy, and see if you can laugh off this one."

AS SATAN tried to come to his feet he felt the foot into his ribs, against his neck, on his forehead, as he bent his head quickly. He didn't go down though. He came to his feet slowly and steadily. His mind was confused. And then suddenly it wasn't. His right hand shot under his left armpit and he saw Hanlon

strike out with his gun, felt it hit him in the face. But he saw Hanlon step back a pace too. Then a voice spoke behind him, a familiar voice:

"Let him stand up, Charlie. Let him walk in. Why should we drag him." A harsh laugh sounded. "I saw you search him, Charlie. He could hardly have had an ordinary safety pin left on him. No, we don't shoot him now, Charlie."

Satan hadn't known it was so warm out. He felt the sweat running down his face, blurring his vision. He thought he saw Otis Henley standing in the doorway. And then the sweat was warm in his mouth and he spit it out. He knew then. It was blood. He didn't speak. He couldn't.

"Come in, come in." Otis Henley spoke softly and, when Satan didn't move, his voice hardened. "I'm not going to play with you, Satan. Too many others have. If I have to kill you here, why, I'll kill you here."

Satan walked steadily enough, he thought, his hands raised. He saw Otis Henley step aside and knew that he stumbled on the step, and that something jammed into his back and that it was Hanlon's gun.

Satan wasn't afraid to die. He had never been afraid to die. But he knew that every minute he lived was helpful. Gunmen before had played around with him, as Henley said. Gunmen before had been as careful as Henley. Yet they were dead and Satan was alive. One couldn't tell. One waited as long as one could. The cards might be stacked against you, but you might watch the dealer carefully, make him nervous, make the deal wrong, make him slip up on a card.

Sure, this was a tough situation. He didn't try to talk himself out of it, not with Henley and Charlie Hanlon. They intended to kill him, of course. There couldn't be any other way out for them. Not after this. They knew it was the end for them or for him. Satan gulped slightly as he went through the lighted

kitchen, then through the dim hall beyond.

He discovered that his head was clear. He wanted to wipe off his face but he discovered also that his hands were held high in the air. Had Henley ordered them that way? But no matter. Satan knew the laws of this night, of the rotten denizens who inhabited the night. He would have put them up anyway.

He was thinking now, wondering why Henley didn't kill him. What use he could be to Henley. Or if it was Hanlon that was going to kill him, would Henley toss Hanlon to the wolves? Make him the scapegoat? But that didn't seem possible. Of course Hanlon could always die too and the blame be put on him or—

Satan Hall walked smack into a lighted room near the front of the house. The curtains before the windows were thick and black. There was no possible chance for any bit of light to show outside. He saw the desk, the furniture, big and luxurious and even tasteful, the shelves of books. Felt the thick rug under his feet.

Yes, Detective Hall saw them all, or felt them all. It was his habit of noticing detail while looking steadily at a single object. He was looking at a single object now. She was leaning against the book case. It was Nan Connors.

The girl started to move forward and stopped. The door behind Satan closed, and a lock turned.

Otis Henley said, "You may put down your hands now, Satan. We are careful men but not frightened men. Chain his foot to that support over there in the corner, Hanlon. All right! Keep us covered and I'll do it."

Henley swiped his gun sideways and Satan ducked, but it caught him on the side of the neck anyway, knocked him off balance, put the dizziness back into his head again. He didn't quite fall, but did slam against the books. He heard the snap then. Henley stepped back. Satan looked down. His right foot was locked in a cuff. That iron cuff was

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attached to a thick chain and the thick chain was twisted around a steel support in a corner where the book cases scattered about the room left a small opening.

THE girl ran over to Satan, stood in front of him. Her eyes were wide. Her mouth hung open. Her breathing was heavy. But all she said as she turned and faced the two men with her back to Satan was:

"No, no, Henley. You swore you wouldn't. You can only harm him through my body. My body, understand?"

Henley went over and sat behind the desk. Hanlon stood to the right of Satan, close against the books, his gun was held in his right hand. It pointed steadily at Satan.

Satan laughed. At least there was a strange sound in his throat and his teeth gleamed white, though his green eyes remained steady. Hanlon slid a foot or two farther from him.

"Hanlon is through anyway," Satan said. He looked over Nan Connors' shoulder toward Otis Henley. "Like the rest of the punks he couldn't take a slapping around. He wouldn't come near me now if you had me trussed up in chains." And with that funny sound in his throat again, "Shoot me to death, Henley. Even then Hanlon won't come near my body until the medical examiner signs the certificate of death. He's afraid. He always was a rat—a yellow rat."

Otis Henley looked over toward Hanlon. The hand that held the gun did seem to shake but Otis didn't know if it was fear or rage. He put it down to a little of both.

Hanlon held his gun up. "Let's do for him now, boss," he said. "Do it the whole way now."

"No." Henley grinned easily across the desk. "There is Satan and there is Satan's girl. Sure, Nan. Stand in front of him if you wish. I'm sporting a forty-five tonight. The bullet will go

through the two of you."

"Me—me?" The girl straightened. "But—you—you— Okay, Otis. Let him go and I'll marry you."

"And what will he do?" Henley waved his gun easily toward Satan.

"I'll swear him to silence!"

"And you, Satan?" Otis looked at him. "You'll swear to silence?"

CHAPTER IX

Quicker Than the Eye



MUTELY the two racketeers stared at Satan, wondering what he'd do. Satan cleared the smears of red from around his mouth and lips with the back of his hand.

"I'll never breathe a word of it—never," he said. And when Hen-

ley's eyes went wide, "Not a word, Henley. I swear. But I'll put six slugs in you the first time we meet." And when the girl turned and faced him, "No, Nan, you—you—"

"I know," she said. "I love you. That's it, isn't it? That's what you were going to say?"

"No," Satan said slowly. "I was going to say—you are like that."

"She's like that, all right." For the first time anger showed in Henley's face. The gutter that he admitted climbing out of was back on his twisted lips, the sneer to his words. "Okay, Satan. You've got a swell woman, though I don't know if she did it because she loves you or hates me. She—"

"You forget, Otis," the girl said, and her voice was very quiet. "If I stayed back with the girls in the club—if I didn't go around with anyone for three months, if I saw you constantly, and then if I didn't want to marry you—well—you'd back the show. That was your agreement. That was what you wanted."

Henley got up and came around the desk. He was looking at the girl.

"Yes," he said. "That was what I thought I wanted. That was the agreement you made me think came from me, let me think would be all settled in three months. And there were times when I did believe it. Times when we dined alone at my apartment. Times when I thought—and then always something would happen. Times when I held you in my arms. Times when you were doing other things when I gave you the key. Times when you were doing—doing this."

He tore a manila envelope from his pocket and threw it down on the floor.

"That's evidence," he cried out. "Evidence that I committed murder. Evidence that the rat—what was it—Frances Hannibal Jones was killed in my apartment. Murdered by me. Sure. You didn't know I had found that out. You didn't know what I planned tonight. You didn't know that I had Fogarty change Satan's beat." He was almost working himself into a fury now. "You love him, don't you? By all that's holy, I'll give you something to love! I'll shoot him to death—bullet by bullet. Hour by hour."

The gun in his right hand exploded suddenly almost in the girl's face. But Satan knew the slug never touched the girl. The left arm that he had planted against the wall to test the strength of the chain fell to his side.

"You gave me your love and—" Henley's gun was coming up again when the girl stepped directly before him.

"That's a lie," she said. "Maybe I would have done it to get the evidence I wanted, just as I'd roll in the gutter to see you burn. But I didn't have to. You were such a fool. That a woman—any woman—who even knew a man like Hall could—" She paused, wet her lips, and Satan thought he saw that same determination in her face when once before she had fought hard for life.

But it couldn't have been that. For she changed almost at once. Her challeng-

ing defiant words became words of denunciation. She ran through events in Henley's past life, the nastiest ones that Satan knew were never even hinted at on the Avenue. She tossed them at him until he flew into a rage.

Henley went clear back into the gutter as she had described him. His words were foul and obscene. He raised his fist, then changed his mind. He brought his hand over and slapped it back across her face. Satan was surprised that she didn't move quicker. Her limbs were as supple as a young birch, her body as pliable as any contortionist's. The movements of her whole being were surpassed only by the movement of her magic hands and fingers.

She did duck the blow a little, Satan thought. And she did glance a bit away as the blow came. It was a vicious blow. She had missed a good part of it. Though it seemed to knock her off the floor she still remained upright—falling—falling, but never quite going down.

THEN Satan saw it, or maybe he only thought he saw it. Certainly he knew her right arm shot out.

But he didn't actually see the hand nor the fingers on the end of that hand until they had twisted the gun from Charlie Hanlon's grip and Satan held Hanlon's powerful automatic. She slapped it smack into his palm. It was as if she had planned Henley's anger, planned even his slap. Planned to grab that gun from the shaking hand of Hanlon. Planned to give it to Satan. Satan knew. There was no luck in it. Yes, she had planned it in every detail.

They fired together, he and Otis Henley. Satan had instantly pressed the trigger the moment he had the gun.

The girl spun wildly between them and Henley missed her. Satan fired again. This time he saw distinctly what he was shooting at, and he put the bullet just below the gasping open mouth of Otis Henley. How bad Otis had been hit before, Satan couldn't guess. He only knew that Otis was raising his gun

again, raising it with some difficulty. Then Satan shot.

One thing he was sure of. Otis Henley was dead. And Hanlon? He had seen the other gun under Hanlon's right armpit. He felt sure it would be out now, spitting lead as he turned.

The gun was out all right, and it was spitting lead. And it was spitting lead at Satan—all around him.

Satan's lips turned up at each end, his eyes narrowed. And he shot Hanlon just under the back of the ear. Maybe it wasn't necessary, for Hanlon had been in a perfect state of panic. Still—at that distance—one of Hanlon's bullets had a fair chance of getting him. Yes, Hanlon was yellow all right. Had Satan's single blow at the One Thousand Club done that to him?

He watched Hanlon then before he hit the floor. It was puzzling to Satan the things dead men did. He watched Hanlon die. Hanlon let his head fall slowly forward on his chest. His knees began to give and he squatted more than fell to the floor. He held that position too, nearly half a minute, Satan thought. Then he rolled over on his side slowly, almost carefully, like a tired old man.

The girl didn't say anything. She went over to Otis Henley and, not without a little quiver, put her hand in his pocket and found the key to the cuff about Satan's foot. She knelt down at his feet, and Satan saw that her shoulders trembled slightly. He knew that the hand that finally set him free—was nothing like the hand that had grabbed Hanlon's gun and thrust it into his. Then she stood up.

She looked very young and very tired.

"What now, Satan?" she said simply.

"That was fast work, head work, Nan," he said slowly.

"Yes." She looked steadily at him. "What else?"

"You saved my life for sure this time, Nan. No two ways about that." He looked down at the envelope on the floor. "You—you were getting that evidence for—for the police?"

"No." She still looked straight at him. "I was getting it for you. I didn't save your life this time. You saved your own and mine. There isn't another man, in or out of the force, who could have handled things like that."

"You saved my life—Nan," Satan said stubbornly. "And—and there was no selfish interest behind it."

"Yes." She went close to him and put both arms up around his neck. "Yes, Satan," she said. "What else?"

FOR one short minute Nan Connors felt that she had everything she wanted in life. Satan was in her arms. His arms—his! She let him down to the floor very gently, looked at the blood on her own hands. Five minutes later she had rinsed out two more towels in the sink off the study.

The bullet that had dropped his left hand had gone into his chest. She used more towels but though she told herself different she felt the blood hadn't stopped. Satan didn't move.

She went to one of the curtains now and slipping behind it listened out into the night. No sirens wailed, no one shouted upon the lawn. She remembered how far in they were from the street, and that Henley had sent everyone home but the man at the gate.

Then Nan went out and listened in the hall. She even went downstairs and listened at the front door. Not a sound. There was the long Zepher standing in front. How easy to slip into it and go out the south gate. She hesitated, then went back upstairs.

She looked again at Satan. Tried to feel for his pulse but couldn't feel any. She bent down close to listen to his breath. She heard none. There were more towels turned red again. How had he stayed on his feet?

Again she saw escape. It would be tough for her to be found there with the dead—the dead Satan. Yes. It was an easy getaway. Surely Satan was going to die or was dead. And she—she— Yes, she would be off into the

night. She bent down on her knees, bent lower still, kissed Satan once full upon the lips. She got up and went toward the door. Satan's head moved and he moaned.

Without hesitation Nan Conners went straight to the phone on the desk.

"Police Headquarters," she heard herself saying, exactly like a girl in the movies. "I want to report a—a killing."

* * * * *

"I feel fine," Satan said, sitting up in the hospital bed. "I never felt better."

"You should feel fine," the nurse said. "We've poured barrels of blood into you." And with a smile, "You are rather honored—er—Detective Hall. Chief Inspector Fogarty has been waiting to see you—waiting a long time."

Satan nearly hopped out of the bed. But he got back in again. The door opened and Fogarty stood in the doorway. Satan watched him dismiss the nurse. Then Fogarty came over and sat down on the edge of Satan's bed.

"For a while," he said, "I thought we were going to lose you." He felt one of Satan's arms as Satan glared at him. "Tough as ever."

"Tougher." Satan glared at him. "Do you think I'll take this lying down? You sold out a cop—tried to send me to my death!"

"Well, not quite." Fogarty stuck a cigar in his mouth but he didn't light it. "For one thing, you're not a cop any more. Back to detective work again." He spread his hands far apart. "We talked it over, you and I. We both agreed that Otis Henley needed killing—and at least you agreed that you were the man to do it. Well. It's done. The papers are praising you."

"Nestor is going to open the show—with the kidnaped star Nan Conners whose life you saved. That is the way it was in the papers. Oh, yes. Nan gave the evidence against Henley. And your little guy you've avenged all right. What was it, Hannibal Jones or something. The evidence went to the press."

And with a broad smile, "It all went, except a small part about a friend of mine who didn't appear at his trial. Sure, I telephoned that message to Sergeant Heathcote, the message that sent you out—and Henley died."

"But you must have told Henley I was coming. You sent me. They sprung the trap and—"

"You came out alive, didn't you?" Fogarty let the cigar slip across his mouth. "How could I let you know if I didn't know myself? And how could I know unless they told me? Hang it, Satan! You don't want to be pampered, do you? All you wanted was one chance in a hundred. Well, I certainly did better than that with you. You like it rough. I gave you all the breaks I could and still save my own face—or my hide for that matter. Some guys might think you've gone sissy. You don't even thank me for a chance to work out of the Commissioner's office again."

Satan looked at that hard set face of Fogarty's.

"I don't know as I want to work out of the Commissioner's office again. I—"

Satan stiffened up in bed. The man in the doorway was dressed in a purple bathrobe. The cane he carried was tucked under his arm. He said slowly, "You know, Fogarty, I don't think Satan knows this all took place ten days ago."

The two men talked pleasantly while Satan got his breath. He knew it was the Commissioner—the real Commissioner—the only Commissioner as far as he was concerned. And then as the Commissioner came over to the bed, the words just jumped out of Satan's mouth.

"You look terrible," he said.

"Well—" The Commissioner twirled the cane around once, pointed the rubber tip at Satan and said simply, "Well, if the insults are going to begin so early—you don't look so screeching good yourself. And what will Satan's red-head say to that? She's waiting to see you now. And Fogarty says quite quaintly that she's sweet on you."

Thubway Tham's Perfect Day



IN A glorious June morning Thubway Tham, the little pickpocket, having partaken of a substantial breakfast, sauntered into Madison Square Park and sought his favorite bench. Finding it unoccupied, Tham seated himself, inhaled deeply and sur-

veyed the vicinity.

Sparrows were twittering and pigeons cooed as they fought for scraps of food tossed around by bench-lunchers. Traffic was flowing gently along the avenues, newsboys were yelling their wares raucously, and thousands of windows in of-

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

fice buildings looked down upon the Square and caused thought that behind them men and women toiled to serve the great god, Business.

New York in June! A gentle breeze that seemed to waft from sylvan glades drifting through man-made canyons lined with lofty buildings, and all that sort of thing.

"Give me New York in June," Thubway Tham muttered, "and you can have the retht of the world includin' Ruthia, Thiberia and pointh eatht. Ath the poet wrote, 'What ith tho rare ath a day in June?' Thith ith perfect!"

At that instant he realized the truth of the oft-quoted remark that there is nothing perfect in this world except perfection, and not much of that. For he glanced up as a shadow suddenly came between him and the sun—and beheld Detective Craddock, the minion of the Law who had sworn frequently to catch Tham "with the goods" and send him "to the Big House up the river for a long stretch."

"Good morning, Tham," Craddock greeted.

"It wath a good mornin' until jutht now," Tham admitted. "Tho I thee your ugly fath again!"

"It'll seem much uglier to you, Tham, on the day the judge gives you the bad news—three to five years."

"How you do carry on!" Tham complained. "And what are you doin' thith thplendid day to earn your wageth, if I may athk? How much longer are you goin' to fool the Polithe Department into payin' you a thalary? Do you alwayth jutht thtroll through the Thquare and eye the pretty girllh and all that thort of thing? Or, can it be that you have your eyeth on me for thome reathon?"

CRADDOCK bestowed a slight smile upon the pickpocket.

"It could be that," he said. "As long as you have the urge, Tham, to dip your clever fingers into pockets other than your own, you may expect to have the

eyes of the Law upon you."

"Craddock, do you dare inthnuate—"

"Let's not go into that old routine, Tham, and ruin such a splendid day. You're a dip and I'm a cop. I really like you, lad. You're so refreshing after listening to the verbal gas down at Headquarters. But I'm out to nab you, Tham! We have certain laws. Strange though it may seem to you, there are persons who dislike having their wallets stolen. Some folks like to spend their own money."

"Why not write a letter to your Congrethman about it?" Tham suggested. "I do not feel like arguin' today. I have the June fever. I feel like takin' a thubway train out to Bronkth Park and layin' on the grath and watchin' the driftin' cloudth."

"The subway part I can understand," Craddock retorted. "In the subway no doubt you would contrive to lift a leather and get enough currency to defray the expenses of your wild debauch, so to speak."

"Yeth, I think I'll go out to the Bronkth zoo," Tham decided. "The animalth there theem tho intelligent after lithtenin' to thertain human bein'th."

"Possibly I'll trail you, Tham, and watch from the near distance, to be of aid should you encounter peril in the wilds," Craddock said. "Shall we start?"

"On thecond thoughtth, thomehow I theem to find mythelf unable to get goin'," Tham reported. "Thith attack of June fever ith thomethin' terrible. If I am able to gather enough thtrength, potherly I will try to make it aft far ath Timeth Thquare later in the day."

"You mean during the rush hour, of course," Craddock hinted. "Ah, what a time that is—for a pickpocket! Thousands of human beings rushing hither and yon, bumping and jostling, jamming against one another, careless of nimble fingers that work contrary to the laws made and provided—!"

"You talk like a politithian," Tham told him. "You mutht have thwallowed a dictionary. No doubt you are tryin'

to impretth me with your gift of gab."

"Only handcuffs to impress you."

"Now, Craddock, you are almotht inthultin'. I wath hopin' to meet you here in Madithon Thquare thith mornin' and path the time of day with you. But I do not like the way you talk, Craddock. Ath far ath I am concerned, you may betake yourthelf elthwhere."

"But I like it here, Tham," Craddock protested. "There is something so soothing about your presence. And I enjoy this fine June day as much as you do."

Craddock grinned and sat on another bench almost directly across the walk from Tham. He extracted a fat cigar from a vest pocket, touched flaming match to the end of it, and puffed in obvious content.

Tham's face was a mask, but inwardly he seethed. He had hoped he would not run into Craddock today. He had believed that this fine June day would be one of good fortune for him; Tham was superstitious about good and bad days.

"What ith tho rare ath a day in June!" he scoffed to himself now.

As Craddock smoked and watched him, Tham looked up at the cloudless blue sky, glanced over those who passed along the walks, yawned frequently, and observed with only a city man's small amount of interest the mad dash of fire department apparatus up the Avenue.

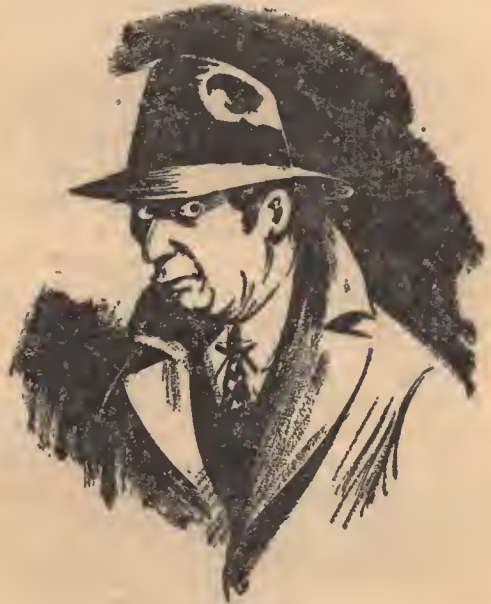
It was in Tham's mind that Craddock would not sit there and keep watch indefinitely. No doubt he had duties that would call him elsewhere before long. But the detective gave no indication of having the fidgets, of being eager to get away. He, too, seemed half asleep under the influence of the benevolent June morning.

Tham began thinking, "I mutht get away from Craddock and lift a leather and get me thome dough. Thith thing ith gettin' to be monotonouth."

THAM was down to less than five dollars, and he knew of only one way to get money quickly. Not wine nor

women nor playing the ponies had caused his financial deficit. Tham was known as a "soft touch." A hard luck tale always made him reach for the pocket in which he kept his money, if he happened to have any.

Yesterday's hard luck tale had been



THUBWAY THAM

legitimate, however. It sounded like the usual hard luck yarn, but Tham knew it was the real thing. And he had a personal interest in it.

He had accidentally met on the street a girl of fourteen, Annie Morse, whose father had been Tham's close friend. He had died in the Big House a year and a half before. His wife, with Annie and a boy of eight to support, had gone to work heroically.

He hadn't seen Annie for some time until this meeting. She was reticent about discussing family troubles, but Tham knew something was wrong and got the truth out of her. Her mother had been ill for months, too ill to work. The small heap of savings had dwindled to nothing. Annie was trying to earn a few dollars.

Tham guessed it was the old story of

arrears in rent, of little food and all that. A very common story, but one which struck home with force when the family of an old friend was involved.

Tham lied to Annie—and it was an old lie, too. He told her that years ago he had borrowed a hundred dollars from her father and never had returned it. He took forty-five dollars out of his pocket and gave it to Annie.

"That will pay up the rent and give you a few dollarth for grub and medithine," Tham had said. "I'll get the retht to you tomorrow or next day, tho you won't have to worry about thingth. You tell your mother that."

And that was why Tham was now down to less than five dollars and had to make Annie's mother another payment to keep his word. The Morse family would be expecting it. And Tham wanted to find a man with a stuffed wallet who could afford to lose whatever it contained. He never stole from a man who looked as if he could not spare the money.

And there was Craddock, by his presence and watchfulness preventing Tham from carrying out his program of help. Tham glanced at him again, and Craddock grinned. Craddock evidently had a roving commission today; he did not have to leave Tham to pursue some duty.

On impulse, Tham got up from the bench and began walking slowly to the Avenue. Craddock arose immediately and followed. Tham did not head for a subway station, but cut across to Broadway and started up that like a man taking a leisurely promenade.

Two blocks up the street, Tham crossed it. That gave him a chance to glance back. And he saw Craddock still following him at a distance of about a quarter of a block.

"The thilly ath!" Tham grumbled.

A little later he was walking where the walks were congested with humanity. Tham had been headed that way. Craddock would have to get closer to him or run the chance of losing him

in the crowd. He paid the detective the credit of not being easily lost. But in thick crowds there was always the chance of something happening that would be to Tham's benefit.

He worked the old dodge of getting across an intersection the last instant before the traffic lights changed and a rush of motor vehicles flowed between him and Craddock. Tham walked faster while it was impossible for Craddock to pursue. He gained a little on the detective.

He glanced ahead, and growled again. This rare day in June was certainly turning into an unsatisfactory day for Tham. Now he saw, standing on a corner and watching the passing crowd, a man known as Gus Anderson.

Gus was a pickpocket who had arrived from Chicago a few days before. He had obtained a room in the lodging house conducted by "Nosey" Moore, retired burglar, where Tham had made his home for several years. Gus had brought Nosey a letter of introduction which had vouched for Gus Anderson as being a professional dip known to the Chicago police—which was his passport to a room in Nosey's hostelry.

GUS was a braggart and Tham had become disgusted with Gus at their first meeting. Moreover, he scoffed at New York. And he infuriated Tham by scorning the subway.

"Who wants to lift leathers in a hole in the ground?" Gus had said. "It's like bein' a confounded mole. There's more money in moll buzzin'. Jewels are the things, if you know a good fence."

Tham had gagged at that. A moll buzzer, a man who robbed women, was the lowest of the low in Tham's estimation. He had no use for such, and he told Gus so. Nosey Moore had prevented the fisticuffs that seemed imminent and had made the men shake hands. His tenants did not fight each other, but combined to fight the cops, Mr. Moore had pointed out.

Now, glancing ahead and seeing Gus

Anderson, Tham guessed the man would speak to him. Being a stranger in town, Gus might want information. Tham knew he needed money; he had told the others at the lodging house that a robbing mouthpiece had left him little more than the price of a ticket to New York.

Tham saw Gus Anderson's face light up as their glances met. Tham frowned quickly and tossed his chin slightly in the direction of his left shoulder, which was an underworld warning that trouble was on his trail. He dodged around a couple of hurrying girls and brushed past Gus.

"Careful—I'm tailed—fat man, brown thuit, big thigar," Tham whispered. "Headquarters man."

He brushed on and stopped at the curb as if to cross Broadway. From an eye corner he saw that Craddock had got past the blocked street intersection and had gained on him. Determination was stamped in Craddock's face. Today, he was bent on shadowing Tham clear to the end.

Tham's warning to Gus Anderson, a man he had disliked at first sight, had nothing of friendship in it. It was the approved thing for the situation, following one of the unwritten rules of such as tread on the fringe of the Law. If Gus Anderson had engaged Tham in conversation, Craddock would have spotted him, and thereafter Gus Anderson would have been a suspect on Craddock's personal list.

At the next corner, Tham turned into a tobacco shop and bought a pack of cigarettes. Through the window, he watched Craddock pass and eye him, then saunter to the curb and stand there waiting. And he also saw Gus Anderson, who plainly enough had been following both Tham and Craddock.

"I've got to have thome dough to give to Annie Morthe," Tham was thinking. "I've got to lift a leather! Craddock and thith Guth Anderthon gangin' up on me and botherin'! 'Oh, what ith thore rare ath a day in June!'"

Tham glared at Gus when he emerged

from the tobacco shop. And he glared at Craddock. He crossed the street just then as the traffic lights changed—and so came to within a few feet of an entrance to the Times Square subway station.

It was nearing the rush hour. Soon the broad subway platforms would be jammed with jostling humanity elbowing to get into and out of crowded cars. In a jam like that, it would not be difficult for Tham to lift a leather, ordinarily. But not with Craddock watching him from only a few feet away.

Anyhow, Tham had to locate a prospective victim first of all. He did not make a practise of going around and feeling in a haphazard fashion in other men's pockets. When he started to get a wallet, he wanted to know there was one to get and just where to find it.

He watched as Craddock stopped a short distance away and eyed him. He watched as Gus Anderson approached, and frowned at him again. But Gus was clever. He stopped a couple of feet from Tham to ignite a match and light a cigarette, and whispered:

"Gotcha, boy! While the dick's busy watchin' you, maybe I can go into the subway and hist a fat one."

Gus walked on. Tham's blood boiled. That was a dirty trick, though it often had been used before. To make a haul while an officer watched another suspect was nothing new. What irked Tham most was that Gus would do it in the subway. Tham felt that the subway was his own particular working ground, and the police knew it to such an extent that Tham often got the blame for a feat of pocket-picking of which he was not guilty.

IDLY Gus Anderson stood at the curb and smoked half his cigarette, then tossed the stub into the street and swung down the stairs to the subway like a man who had made a sudden decision. Tham remained standing where he was. Men and women were thronging to the stairs and down them now,

Craddock still watched from the near distance.

Six feet from Tham there stopped a couple that did not call for any great attempt at analysis on Tham's part. The man was perhaps forty, tall and sleek, with a flashing smile, and his attire was strictly up to the moment.

"Wolf!" Tham thought.

The girl was perhaps twenty-five, and she wore too much makeup and was dressed on the flamboyant side.

"Lady wolf!" Tham judged. "One ith ath bad ath the other."

He heard the man speaking: "It's okay, lovely. I've got to hurry downtown on a little business. But I'll meet you here at five this evening. Be sure to meet me right here."

"And if you shouldn't meet me?" the flashy girl asked, suspicion in her eyes.

"Don't worry about that. Everything's okay, like I said. Meet me at five and we'll have time to get that little pretty you want before the jewelery shop closes."

"Oh? You mean you have to go down town and get the money—that it? And if your business doesn't work out, you won't be able to make it back here by five?"

"You're a suspicious little goose," he told her. "I'm as anxious as you are to make it at five. And you're wrong, dumpling. I've got a stuffed billfold in my pocket right now, more than enough for the pretty and a good time tonight afterward. Hit a heavy poker game with both fists last night. I've got to hustle. See you at five!"

The man patted her on the shoulder, gave her a reassuring smile, and turned to get into the crowd that was fighting its way down the subway stairs.

Tham's heart was hammering at his ribs. What a perfect setup! Tham knew the man's type, and the girl's. He would not think it much of a crime to lift ill-gotten gains from the man. Helping Annie Morse and her mother would be a better deed than to allow the money to be spent for a "pretty" for that girl.

And there was Tham's logical victim getting away from him. And Craddock was still watching. And Tham did not know in which pocket his prospective victim carried the billfold. This day was not so good!

Tham turned quickly and started down the stairs. From the corner of his eye he saw Craddock toss away his cigar and follow.

Tham was fortunate in one thing—a jam on the stairs had prevented the man with the billfold getting on down to the platform quickly. Edging along the wall, Tham got close to him.

The platform was thronged. A downtown express was at the station, and men and women were fighting to get off it and into it. The man Tham was watching started toward the express, but a sudden press of hurrying humanity obstructed him. The car doors rolled shut and the express dashed away through the tunnel. The man Tham was watching made a gesture that expressed disgust, then stood quietly near the edge of the platform waiting for the next downtown express.

Tham yawned and stifled the yawn with the back of his hand. He could see Craddock about twenty feet away standing between him and the stairway, a little out of the crowd. Tham's blood was boiling again. What a chance this was! Here was an opportunity to get a fat wallet from a man who deserved to lose it, a chance to help the Morse family and perhaps have a little over for his own needs.

But there was Detective Craddock, his arch enemy, only a few feet away, watching carefully, ready to pounce upon Tham if he made a move!

THAM knew a trick and decided to work it, though it would be a little risky. As a good pickpocket must, Tham knew the usual reactions of human beings to a sudden situation. The trick he had in mind would cause a commotion during which Tham might be able to do his work and dodge Craddock. And

also it might make his prospective victim reveal in which pocket he carried his fat billfold.

Tham waited a moment, until there was a fresh surge of human beings, and moved slightly nearer the man with the fat billfold. And suddenly his voice sounded in a shrill yell which rang above the din of the platform's tumult:

"Pickpocket! Pickpocket! There he goth!"

The shrill call had the effect Tham expected it to have, and something more. All around him, men felt quickly of pockets wherein they kept wallets, and Tham saw the one he was watching feel quickly of his left hip pocket and then straighten up.

But, as Tham moved toward him swiftly, he saw something more. His wild yell had started something less than thirty feet away. There, a man suddenly started to break through the crowd with violence, knocking aside screaming women and yelling men. Tham's wild yell had flushed a pickpocket in his act of crime. And Tham saw that the man trying frantically to escape was Gus Anderson!

And Detective Craddock had whirled around to start after his quarry, shouting: "Stop! I'm an officer! Stop or I'll shoot!"

In that instant, Tham crowded against the man who was intending to buy his girl a pretty. He got the wallet in the crush and slipped back through the jostling crowd. A downtown local was preparing to pull out, and Tham dodged into a car just as the door was closing.

The billfold was in his pocket. His fingers grasped it, and without removing it from his pocket Tham extracted the currency it contained, and stuffed the bills into a pocket of his vest. At Penn Station, Tham mingled with others getting off the train—and dropped the incriminating billfold underfoot.

He ascended to the street, his face a mask though he was feeling jubilant. He examined his loot as he walked past the shops. He had almost five hundred dollars.

"That wath a cheap wolf," he thought. "A girl like the one he wath talkin' to wantth a pretty that cotht more'n five hundred."

But it was a windfall for Tham at the moment. He could take care of Mrs. Morse and Annie until they could get along better. And he would have a little for himself—for a man had to eat, wear clothes and pay room rent.

Nor was that all.

Tham summed up: He had got the billfold right under Craddock's nose. He had the money he needed so sorely. And Gus Anderson, the dip who had forsaken the ethics of the profession by pulling a trick in another man's territory, was either caught by now or had been almost caught and the life half scared out of him.

All in all, it was a good day.

A sudden thought came to Tham. He grinned as he hurried along the street, and muttered:

"The poet wath right. 'Oh, what ith tho rare ath a day in June!'"



COMING NEXT ISSUE

THUBWAY THAM BEGINS THE YEAR

Another Entertaining Story by JOHNSTON McCULLEY

MR. MORPHO



With his hand hovering over his pistol, Prine stopped and listened to the jungle sounds

By
ARTHUR J. BURKS

TO IMAGINATIVE David Prine, Special Investigator, something inexpressibly evil hung over the strange studio of "Mr. Morpho." His real name was Rushford Lambert, but nobody in Porto Novo knew him by that name. To the oldest and youngest he was known only as "*Senhor Morpho*, the silent little man who makes beautiful

things of murdered butterflies." For five years he had now lived in the neat cabin he rented from Pedro Chagas, owner of the Plantation which reached far back into the jungles and down to the east bank of the Tapajos. Morpho was a bachelor. He had never looked twice at the women of Brazil, though many of the young ones had cast pro-

Only the silent butterfly-collector, Rushford Lambert, knew what had happened to Agent Bob Faust—and he wouldn't tell!

vocative glances at him. He was an excellent catch. He was richer even than Pedro Chagas from whom he rented his cabin. It was no secret how he earned his money.

He killed butterflies. He shaped amazingly beautiful wooden trays with his shining set of metal tools which he guarded exactly as if they had been surgical instruments. He piled up the trays, cases, powderboxes, whatever it entered his head to make of the many woods of the jungles, sent long lists of specifications to the United States, and shapes of glass to exactly fit the nooks and crannies of his wooden artistry came back to him.

Between his wood and glass shapes he had ordered he lovingly set the exquisite wings of the butterflies he killed, glued them in with his own special preparations, taken from the juices of trees. These he carefully dried in the sun at intervals, standing over them until they suited him. Then with his own hands he packed his gorgeous work and shipped it to the United States.

People in the United States paid fabulous prices for the "souvenirs of the Amazon Valley," and Mr. Morpho, in five years, was very well-to-do. This much had David Prine gleaned before ever he saw or met Mr. Morpho. It had taken him an hour to find out the man's right name. That Mr. Morpho was a man beloved in the community of Porto Novo was quite clear. He gave cash money for improvements on the waterfront, to arrange picnics for children and many other things. He was always too busy to attend any of these affairs himself, but he gave before he was asked. For the rest, he wished only to be let alone.

A Brazilian woman cooked and kept his house; her husband did whatever was required of him outdoors. He gathered the woods that Mr. Morpho wanted, made shipping crates, nailed them shut. He was always busy.

The man and his wife adored their master, but knew nothing about him

save that he never talked, seemed almost never to sleep, wore the thick-lensed spectacles a zoologist or naturalist was supposed to wear, was just as absent-minded, careless of his clothes, forgetful of food and drink, forgetful of jungle dangers on his wanderings into the *matto*.

Ruymundo Jose, his man servant, once followed him, fearful that carelessness of Mr. Morpho would make him meat for a jaguar or target for a snake, and for the first and last time Mr. Morpho had been firm with him. He had ordered him back in no uncertain terms.

"Don't worry, Ruymundo," he said. "I can take care of myself. If I cannot, whatever happens to me is my own responsibility."

This David Prine also learned, from Ruymundo Jose himself. It was Ruymundo who conducted him into the laboratory where Mr. Morpho did his most exacting work, since it was always open. Anyone who wished might enter it, except children under sixteen.

DAVID PRINE was told that Mr. Morpho was, as always at this time, out hunting butterflies. He specialized in Morphos of whichever species of that often gorgeous thing he could find. They formed, under glass, the most exquisite of his trays. Most people, when they knew in the States what he did, ordered "something with Morphos," and since Morphos were quite rare, he had standing offers out for them.

When two people together saw a Morpho one ran to him, miles if necessary, while the other followed the Morpho and did not lose it. They never tried to catch them for him, since he had never purchased one that anyone else had handled. They spoiled the wings, ravished the luster.

David Prine sat in the laboratory in a comfortable chair, with golden tropical sunlight streaming through high windows, and looked about him. Then he shivered, feeling that "inexpressible

evil" from the moment he entered.

"Where did Bob Faust go from here?" he whispered to himself. "What kind of a man is it, who so carefully slays butterflies—and handles them with surgical instruments? Did Bob ever reach this cabin? How did he vanish? Does this Mr. Morpho know anything about him?"

The shining metal instruments, delicate themselves as the wings of butterflies, which Mr. Morpho used in his work, were laid out in neat rows inside a glass case fastened to the wall back of the table. The sun struck them through the high glass, and its light danced upon their smooth silvery surfaces. To David Prine there was something evil even in that. What could be done with those instruments, besides dissecting butterflies?

To David Prine, twenty-five years old, a novice at the sort of work in which he was engaged, an adventurer who had not yet experienced much adventure, butterflies were living things. What right had any man to slay them? Mr. Morpho had killed thousands of Morphos, for he also supplied specimens to scientific organizations all over the world. Because of his skill in their preparation, he commanded top prices. So far as David Prine was concerned, Mr. Morpho battened on death.

"And what of Bob Faust?" he asked himself again. "He was tough, not squeamish like me. What did he do to Mr. Morpho? *Why* did he visit Morpho? What took place between them?"

Robert Ravenel Faust, also a special investigator, had vanished from the world six months before. He had been in Brazil at the time on a case and had written David Prine that he was going to quit work for a week or two and enjoy himself. He spoke of the strange Mr. Morpho he had heard about, who liked to collect butterflies too! That was Bob Faust's last known communication in this world.

David Prine noted various stages of Mr. Morpho's work on the table, but

had no urge whatever to look at any of it. He just sat and wondered what Mr. Morpho really was like.

"You are interested in butterflies?" came a soft voice from the door. David Prine whirled to look at Mr. Morpho and caught himself just in time to keep from laughing aloud. "*The lepidoptera*, I believe, are the most interesting of insects. Your name is Prine? Oh, there are no secrets here. You gave your name to someone, and people met me on the trail to say I had a visitor. I am much interested when people come to see me. There are not many. You are the second this year. A Mr. Robert Faust came a few months ago."

Prine felt deflated when he saw how small and inoffensive looking Mr. Morpho was. Five feet four in height, no more, and built in proportion. Spent hours under the sun, but did not tan. Mr. Morpho peeled. He came in with a specimen case, which he carefully placed on his work bench. He doffed a pith helmet with a ragged brim. He stood his catch-net in a corner where, Prine would wager, he had stood it, exactly so, for all his five years in Porto Novo. His clothes were worn denim that had once been blue. His jacket was denim, also, with many pockets, in all of which bottles rattled as he walked.

He was the perfect comic opera naturalist, even to the thick-lensed spectacles. It was plain that this inoffensive, contemptible little man had never done anything to Bob Faust, a strapping six-footer who could have pulled him apart with his fingers. Yet, Prine's thoughts wandered back to those shining instruments. Little men learned early the worth of "equalizers." Besides, the place made David Prine nervous. Since Mr. Morpho had arrived, that feeling had grown instead of lessening, and now stood at an all time high.

"They call me Morpho," said the naturalist, "because I specialize in Morpho butterflies. How long shall you be in Porto Novo? Weeks, I trust? You will be my guest while you are here, of

course? We're both Americans, and there is plenty of room. Also, my cook is the best in Brazil. I taught her myself. I cultivate my own garden, raise my own chickens, rabbits and pigs. I do myself well. You will have meals you could not get in New York."

But for one thing Prine would have made excuses, and gone back downriver to Santarem, to start all over again: that one thing was the loquacity of Mr. Morpho. The people in Porto Novo with whom Prine had talked all said he was a silent man, who almost never spoke—beyond saying "no" when people brought him butterflies instead of taking him to where they were.

COULD his loquacity be sufficiently explained by the fact that he so seldom had any one with whom to speak his own language?

"I had arranged to stay with Chagas," said Prine, "but the food question outweighs even courtesy. I'll accept. I'm an amateur naturalist myself, which is why I am here. I heard of you in the States, and in Belem and Santarem, where your work is famous."

Prine could have kicked himself when he spoke the lie that he was an amateur naturalist, for the rankest amateur could prove him a liar by asking him any one of a million questions. What, for instance, had Morpho meant when he called a butterfly a *lepidoptera*? He didn't know, but if Mr. Morpho suspected anything, he gave no sign. Moreover, he could not now say he did not wish to watch when Mr. Morpho said:

"I have several specimens which I must prepare before they spoil. After that it will be lunch time. Since you are interested in these matters, you may watch, and I shall be most grateful for suggestions."

David Prine offered no suggestions. Squeamish as he was about killing helpless creatures he still watched the hands of Mr. Morpho with utter fascination. The man's fingers were the fingers of an artist, delicate, sure as precision instru-

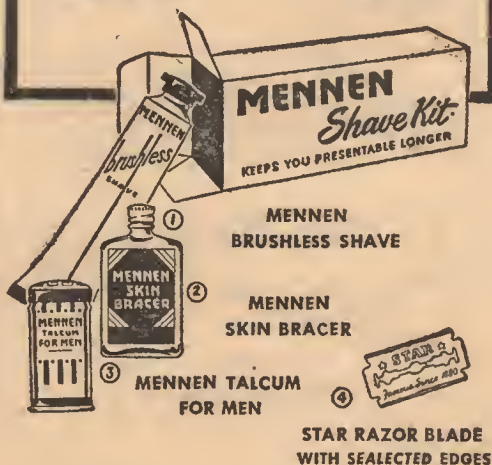
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ments. When he wished some instrument from the case he reached up, opened the case, reached in, took what he desired, without taking his eyes off the hauntingly lovely black and blue, still living, creature he held down on the table top, on a smooth area where it could not be harmed.

The slaying was so deft that Prine's heart contracted and for several seconds he could not catch his breath. One instant and the iridescent Morpho was alive, next second it was dead, its glistening wings its hostages to destiny. On those wings the sun struck tiny rainbows of color, and almost it seemed to Prine that as Mr. Morpho worked he arranged and rearranged the colors of the butterfly's wing "dust," even the reflections of sunlight on beauty that hurt the heart.

Here was a man who could play God to the small creatures, correcting and altering the labor of the Master. And while he worked, with great speed and the acme of care, he was so absorbed in his work that Prine was satisfied he did not know that a stranger stood and watched. He had placed his helmet exactly on the spot it must always have occupied and Prine noticed that he had a tiny bald spot, that his hair was a dirty gray. Mr. Morpho was about fifty years of age, Prine judged.

Since Mr. Morpho was oblivious to him, Prine turned away to look at some of the finished trays and cases, some which had not been assembled but were ready with wood and glass, awaiting only the wings of tropical beauty. He had scarcely turned his head when Mr. Morpho spoke, a bit sharply he thought:

"It is better to look when I show you. There is a knack in doing this work which I should explain. I am somewhat proud of it, though of course it is all side-issue to my work for museums and scientific groups."

Prine stood, did not answer. Briefly Mr. Morpho looked up from his work.

"I did not mean to use a minatory tone," he said. "I always do, it seems,

when some word or move distracts me from my work."

"I apologize," said Prine. "It was thoughtless of me, but I thought you were so deep in your work you wouldn't notice."

Mr. Morpho apparently did not hear, yet Prine was acutely aware that he did hear and understand, that in all probability, for all the man's genius with small tools, his concentration was a pose, expected of a man who did the work he did. And why, Prine asked himself, didn't Mr. Morpho wish him to look at the woodwork? Had Bob Faust's experiences with this man paralleled Prine's so far? Had Faust then stood and waited, or had he gone airily ahead, as Faust might very well have done, to examine the trays without awaiting the pleasure of their maker?

If Faust had disregarded Mr. Morpho, what had Mr. Morpho done about it? Of one thing Prine was sure: when Mr. Morpho had "asked" him to wait to look at those trays, cases, fans, he had meant, emphatically, that Prine was to keep his hands off them! The little man was not deterred by differences in size. Prine, like Faust, was a big man, could have crushed Mr. Morpho in one hand—but Prine's eyes went back to the metal instruments in Mr. Morpho's hand, and in the case within reach of his hand. Prine knew nothing of such instruments, except that these appeared to be surgical, and he knew that surgical instruments could be deadly in the hands of the wrong people.

Prine stayed quite close to Mr. Morpho, who suddenly looked up at him.

"You didn't say whether you knew Mr. Robert Faust. My impression is that you did. He, too, was much interested in my butterflies, my trays, cases, fans—all the rest of it. He thought I should extend my market vastly. He was going to do something about it himself when he returned to the States, but people forget, I guess. I never heard from him."

"I knew Bob Faust," said Prine, com-

ing to a decision. "We were friends. The last letter I had from him he was coming to visit you. That's why I am here. I didn't hear from him again, nor did his family. He simply vanished."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Morpho, removing his spectacles to clean them with a spotless linen handkerchief while he blinked his eyes at David Prine. "I'll tell you all I can, naturally. He spent several days here, four or five I think. Then he hired a *canoa* from a friend of mine in the village here, to go to Pindobal. And goodness! It just now occurs to me that he never returned! Pindobal is only a few kilometers down the bank, too. I think I must have been too pre-occupied all these months to realize that he simply never came back. He must have caught a steamer or a launch at Pindobal!"

DAVID PRINE himself had come ashore at Pindobal. It had taken him an hour and a half to walk the jungle trail to Porto Novo, farther south, where steamers and launches did not regularly call—except launches to pick up the work of Mr. Morpho.

That certainty of inexpressible evil grew more and more in David Prine. This man knew what had happened to Robert Faust. He consistently referred to him in the past tense. His blinking eyes were dangerous, and Mr. Morpho did not try to hide it. His hands were a surgeon's hands, capable of unspeakable things no surgeon would do. No longer did David Prine base his distrust on the fact that the man "murdered" butterflies. It was now based on the fact that Mr. Morpho had practically admitted Bob Faust was dead. Prine now believed this man Mr. Morpho was more deadly than any snake that crawled in the Brazilian jungles! Prine had watched him using those surgical tools. Which one of them had killed Robert Faust?

What had happened to his body?

Why had none of those Brazilians whom he had conversed with mentioned

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The distance between Santarem and Porto Novo was forty kilometers perhaps. How had Faust done it?

"It's odd," Prine said, when Mr. Morpho led the way into a spotless dining room off his laboratory, "that nobody told me about Faust having been here. He was a big man. They should have noticed."

"Did you use the past tense in reference to Mr. Faust?" asked Mr. Morpho.

"No word has been received of him for months," said Prine. "I did use the past tense—quite properly, I think."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Morpho. "Do you suspect foul play?"

"There are countless possibilities, all of them foul," said Prine. "Nothing but foul play would dispose of Bob Faust. He was too good a man in his line to get himself killed, even by accident."

"And what was his line, Mr. Prine?" asked Mr. Morpho softly. "The same as your own?"

"The same as mine," said Prine quietly.

"Amateur naturalist!" said Mr. Morpho. "Were you really interested in the work I did with the *coleoptera*?"

"Very much," said Prine.

"Except that, as I stated," said Mr. Morpho, "they were *lepidoptera*! Perhaps, Mr. Prine, you had best stay with the Chagas', after all! One of the reasons I live here alone is that I am away from the world of presumptuous nosey meddlers!"

David Prine laughed softly.

"I don't blame you for being angry," he said. "But you have asked me to a meal which you boast will be good, the first of several good meals. I do not intend to miss them. You asked me to remain with you and I hold you to it. If I upset you, I am sorry and will try not to do it again. Did not Bob Faust tell you his business?"

"He did not, but he was some sort of a spy," said Mr. Morpho as he motioned Prine to a chair beside a table loaded with delicious food. "I hide myself away from the world, but is not that my business? And since your business and Faust's are the same, what is that business?"

"If it had anything to do with you, I would be a fool to tell you," said Prine, watching the man's face carefully. "If not concerned with you,

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there's no reason to reveal it. My business is one that prospers best when not discussed."

"Of what am I suspected then?" asked Mr. Morpho, doing full justice to the viands, and reminding Prine that someone had said that a man, living alone, quickly developed the eating habits of a wolf.

"But for one thing," said Prine conversationally, "I could suspect you of doing away with Bob Faust."

"And that one thing?" said Mr. Morpho. "I suppose you mean his size, and that he was a fighter who could squeeze me to death between thumb and forefinger. Remember, my friend, I have brains, and certain instruments, which would overcome even Bob Faust—if I wished!"

Was there a threat in the words and voice of Mr. Morpho? David Prine felt his flesh crawling as he managed to do a good job on the roasted *paca* with *farinha* dressing, the *macacheira*, chicken, rice and beans, *goiabada* and mixed fruits as well as fruit salad for dessert, followed by powerful black Brazilian coffee in thimble size cups.

"There are scientific books you may read after *sesta*," said Mr. Morpho. "I am going into the woods and do more collecting."

"Fine! I'll go with you!"

"Nobody goes with me!" said Mr. Morpho tartly. "Laymen don't know how to behave among the forest creatures. Besides, I can concentrate better alone when I don't have to protect some bumbling outsider."

P RINE grinned. He really didn't wish to go with Mr. Morpho this particular afternoon, not when he wished to have a good look at those finished trays which Mr. Morpho had so obviously not wished him to see, since, when he finished with his butterflies, he conveniently "forgot" to show them to his guest.

Mr. Morpho, toggled out to fit the part Prine was convinced he was playing, for

all that he was good at what he was doing, departed for the rim of the jungles which rose on the slope which was the Tapajos' eastern bank, and vanished in a tangled mat of trees, palms, vines, grass, weeds and shrubs at the horizon. Prine watched him out of sight, then walked into the laboratory.

Not a single tray, finished or unfinished, nor any part of any tray, remained to be seen! Mr. Morpho himself had not moved them, for they had been in the laboratory when Prine and Morpho had entered the dining room together. During the meal, somebody had removed all of those beautiful creations, made by Mr. Morpho.

Prine told himself grimly, "But I don't need to see them. I can say this second why Morpho keeps them away from me. Now where can they have been hidden?"

Prine hesitated. The laboratory, the whole house of Mr. Morpho, seemed to be silently waiting for something, just as it had waited while Bob Faust tried to figure out about the trays and cases and nut bowls. Faust had got the answer and Morpho had killed him, so Prine figured it.

[Turn page]

A Message from J. EDGAR HOOVER



Crime prevention is essentially a local problem depending for its success upon the coordinated activity of all citizens to provide intelligent guidance, wholesome entertainment, clean and attractive surroundings for all young Americans. That is why I heartily support the Red Feather youth services for which the Community Chests are currently raising funds, along with Red Feather health and welfare services. The boundless energy of youth must be directed into healthy channels if we are to effectively curb juvenile delinquency. I believe that none of the activities of the Community Chest is more important than this. —J. EDGAR HOOVER.

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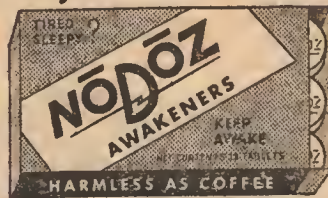
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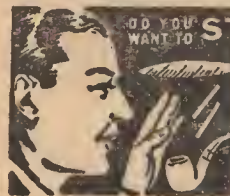
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"Morpho has gone to cover up any trace of Bob that may be left!" Prine decided. He looked at the instruments in the case. Counting things was a habit with him. A half dozen of the scalpels—or what he would have called scalpels—were missing. Just what had Morpho gone into the woods for? Faust must have wondered about that too. Faust had followed him. Faust had disappeared, probably forever. It was now Prine's duty to follow. Would he also disappear?

Prine, carrying a stick, helmet set firmly on his head, stepped into Morpho's front yard. Casually Ruymundo Jose rose from tending a rose bush.

"The master does not like to be followed," he said.

"Did he tell you to tell me that?" asked Prine. "And where are the *brincedos* of wood, glass and butterflies' wings?"

"To every question I answer with a shake of the head," said Ruymundo, suiting the action to the word.

"The forests are free," said Prine.

"Not these forests, *Senhor*," said Ruymundo Jose.

David Prine, aware of the comforting feeling of the small pistol in his inside pocket, started jauntily off in the direction Mr. Morpho had taken. He had carefully marked the spot where the little man had vanished along the trail. His footprints, shod, should be easy to pick out among the prints of barefoot people.

Prine came shortly, out of sight of Porto Novo, to the spot where the small footprints ended. He studied the trail on either side. To the right there was a strip of jungles between the trail and the river; to the left only the jungles, for as far as he knew hundreds of miles.

He found where the prints left the trail. But no sooner had he set foot in the thick woods than he realized how hopeless it was not just locating a man in the jungles, but even to finding one's way back from a spot fifty yards from the trail. Nevertheless, since Faust had tried it, Prine must try it, too.

"He could have vanished into the jungle itself, without trace," Prine thought, with a cold feeling along his spine. There was something dreadful about the stillness, the air of waiting expectancy of the jungles. He cast about him, glad for previous jungle training, though in jungles which bore no resemblance to this, and realized shortly that Morpho's marks followed a dim trail, once one got deep enough into the woods to lose sight of the main trail.

His heart hammered with excitement, feeling that he was on the track of something at last, though he could see no actual footprints on the trail through rotting wood, leaves and nostril-stinging mold, Prine continued his march, as silently as he could. And he had not climbed halfway up the slope east of the river when something told him that he was being followed. Ruy-mundo Jose, or some wild animal? It could have been either.

Prine could hear no sound when he

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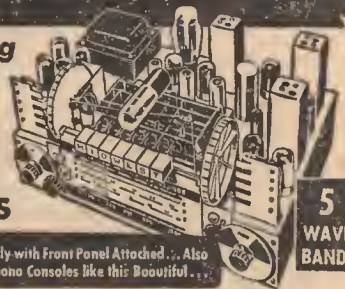
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stopped to listen, but when he walked he could sense the sound of someone else, or something else, mingling with the sound he made as he advanced. It was eerie, fearsome, yet the fact that danger walked behind him, and lay ahead, took away much of his dread of what might lie ahead of him. It was a challenge to his reckless spirit. Huge trees loomed all about him, interspersed with many varieties of palms. A murderer could have shot him from behind any of them, or stepped out quickly and beheaded him with a *terçado*.

Or a sly man could have walked in his steps after he passed any big tree, and cut his throat from behind with, say, a scalpel of delicate precision! But Prine went on, after shifting his pistol to his belt where his hand hovered over it as he walked. The jungle made his flesh crawl, for dangers that were not of men were everywhere present he well knew. A snake no longer than his finger could kill him; a snake thirty feet long could crush him in seconds. A jaguar could jump him from behind a sullen green bush, as jaguars sometimes jumped men who followed the gloomy rubber *estradas*.

BUT he kept on going. The trail became more pronounced. He realized that he was probably the first man beside Morpho ever to follow this trail. If there were a rubber *estrada* nearby he had not seen it. Brazilians seldom pushed through trackless jungles.

There was a ravine then, with *saüba* mounds on its sides, with the destructive ants busy on their mighty galleries. Farther up the ravine there were other holes which increased his feeling of dread: *paca* holes in which the bush-master lived with the rodents in perfect amity! A man walked close with death here even if there were no Morpho or Ruymundo Jose.

The trail swung to the top of a thickly wooded hill—and came to an end at the thick door of a hut made of logs, rocks

and brush held together with clay now dried to brick-hardness. The hut seemed to jump at Prine out of the shadows of the forest which hung closely over it. The builder of the hut had not made a clearing. That builder had made it impossible for the hut to be found save by accident.

Prine slipped behind a tree to study the ground. A low humming sound came from inside, a sound that made his heart jump. No question about it, someone was inside, and that someone was busy at something that had nothing to do with butterflies! Did Prine have enough evidence to make a move? Had Bob Faust stood right here and asked himself the same question? Had he then moved forward as Prine knew he must do, and found himself facing death across the threshold of that hut?

If the man behind that door were doing what Prine believed he was doing, Prine's duty was plain. In any event the most he could do would be to become angry with Prine for intruding. No further time should be wasted.

Prine looked around him, then moved swiftly to the door, pushed it open, stepped inside. His pistol was in his hand. Kerosene lanterns with reflectors helped the light of day to turn the interior of the hut into a kind of inferno. The lights were there, and all the evidence Prine would need, though he was far distant from the place he must eventually take it.

Except for Prine, the hut was empty. The humming of the small dynamo that he had heard had ended. The hut waited as the cabin of Morpho at Porto Novo seemed to wait. Prine, in civilian clothes, was a trespasser. But he could

[Turn page]

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be killed here, as Faust had been killed, and none the wiser until a third man came to investigate his disappearance.

Prine moved forward to look at the machinery and materials on the workbench. A voice spoke from somewhere—overhead, from right or left, from below.

"You would do it, and you were warned! I warned Faust, too, but he was another of those duty-bound young men who lack intelligence."

"Show yourself, Lambert," said Prine grimly. "You're finished. You can kill me, but others will follow me, and in the end you will pay. If you killed Faust, there is nothing we can do about it. The United States has no jurisdiction, as you know, and Brazil would give you at most a few years in prison. Better come with me and get it over with. I have all the papers, of course."

"I am not going anywhere with you, Prine," said Morpho, who now appeared to Prine's left, holding a shotgun. The muzzle covered Prine's midriff. Mr. Morpho was now minus his thick-lensed spectacles, and his eyes did not blink at all. They were small, mean, vicious, and murder looked out of them. He had come out of an offset apparently built for the purpose he had just used it. Mr. Morpho, the naturalist, knew protective coloration; Prine had entirely missed the offset.

"I could drill you with a pistol bullet," said Prine, "but you could blow me apart with the shotgun. Is that the way you killed Faust?"

"You're an investigator, find out how I did it! I told you he went to Pindobal and disappeared."

"Did he ever get to Pindobal?" asked Prine softly. "Did he leave the rented canoa and swing back through the jungles to this very hut? When he reached here, did he allow himself to be taken off-guard and shot in the stomach?"

"As you are going to be?" asked Morpho. "There is a difference with you,

Prine, which is why you are still alive: people of Porto Novo, though in my pay, are not to be trusted too far, and they know you are a guest of mine. I must be sure about how you disappear. Faust came in secret, and the *canoe* he rented was Ruymundo Jose's, whom I could trust—"

Suddenly Prine took a great chance. He sprang back to the left, swinging the back of his hand at Mr. Morpho. The shotgun exploded, blowing a hole in the air where Prine had stood. Prine's hand crashed into Mr. Morpho's face before he could fire the second barrel. Mr. Morpho went down, but as he fell Prine tapped him between the eyes with the muzzle of his pistol.

A half hour later Mr. Morpho was still unconscious as Prine carried him along the main and only street of a grimly silent Porto Novo to the laboratory where, for five years, Mr. Morpho had been the mystery of the old harbor. Ruymundo cried out when he recognized the limp bundle on Prine's back. Ruymundo Jose's wife stuffed her apron in her mouth and great tears came to her eyes to roll down her fat cheeks. For these two a paradise that had lasted five years had come to an end.

"Bring me one of the completed trays, Ruymundo," said Prine. "It's useless now to try to prevent what must happen."

FROM the bundle on Prine's back came the subdued voice of Mr. Morpho:

"Obey, Ruymundo. There is nothing else to do."

Mr. Morpho struggled, but Prine set him down. His wrists were bound with

[Turn page]

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a length of stout vine. Mr. Morpho swayed as he stood. But Prine would always remember that in his hour of defeat his first thought was for Ruymundo and Tereza, his wife.

"There is money enough for the rest of your lives," he told them. "I shall not need it. I shall make arrangements in Santarem so that you will collect it each month. Then you will be sure to have it while you live."

Ruymundo came with one of the trays. It was an exquisite thing, a calling card tray of *jacaranda*, inset with glass. Between glass and wood was a gorgeous mosaic of butterflies' wings, with a Morpho as the center of the design. Prine felt as much a murderer as he had thought Morpho, when the man was killing the butterflies, when he struck the glass with the butt of his pistol and broke it into quarters which he spilled out of the wooden section.

Something like a sob burst from Mr. Morpho as Prine blew softly on the now exposed butterflies' wings. They rose in an iridescent cloud, were caught up by the wind and borne away. Close against the wood, where the wings had hidden it, was a one-hundred-dollar bill, apparently legal tender of the United States of America!

"You are a master artist, Lambert," said Prine softly. "These bills have fooled hundreds of experts. You can imagine how badly the Treasury Department has wished to question you. Thanks to the presses in the hut in the jungles, and these trays and bowls of your latest shipments to the States, it will be easy to answer the questions. All but one: how did your people get the money out of the trays without breaking the glass or disturbing the wings, before they sold the exquisite trays and made you famous for the *honest* kind of art?"

"My accomplices," said Morpho, "are not bulls in china shops. The trays are easily separated in a breezeless darkroom. The wings stick to the glass, the money to the wood. One takes out the money, restores the parts of the trays."

There was professional pride in Morpho's voice. He smiled in sickly fashion.

"I would have been out of the business in another month if Faust had not caught me, Prine," he said. "Making the trays satisfied me and made me enough money. If only I had changed over in time!"

Prine shook his head. "Too much queer already pushed during the past five years, Lambert."

"If it were not for your friend Faust," said Morpho, "I would ask you a big favor."

"What favor?" asked Prine.

"That my name be Mr. Morpho until we leave Porto Novo for good. I have been happy with the name."

"Okay, Mr. Morpho," said David Prine. "What can either Faust or I lose?"

"Mr. Morpho" looked out at the broad expanse of the Tapajos and Prine thought he had never seen a human face so filled with regret and sadness—not however, he knew, with remorse because he had counterfeited the money of his country and murdered one of its officials, but because he had at last been caught.

Answers to

The Crime Quiz

(See Page 81)

1. Embezzlement is the appropriation of property that is left in a person's trust. The bank clerk who lifts money out of the cash drawer and bets it on the races is guilty of embezzlement. The money was entrusted to him and he violated the trust by taking the money for himself.
2. No, not if such killing is necessary and is a last resort.
3. No. Fingerprints may be changed temporarily by burning, wounding, or sanding them down, but the pattern with all its details will reappear as soon as the skin heals.
4. Greater in either case. The average step length of a person walking rapidly is 35 inches. It's 40 or more when he's running.
5. No. The hands gradually become powerless as a person lapses into unconsciousness, and so he'd never be able to complete the job.



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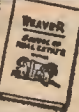
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

zine that brings you an all-star assortment of detective and mystery fiction, and our next issue promises to be among the all-time best. There'll be many short stories in addition to the longer ones—every one a winner!

LETTERS FROM READERS

THERE'S a swell batch of letters this month from you readers, and we want to thank you for them. To those of you who haven't yet written, we want to extend the welcome mat. Join the circle of friends who write us letters and postcards.

Our first letter comes from far, far away.

I have read many detective magazines, but BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE is tops with me. I was just lucky to pick up the first copy of BLACK BOOK only one week ago in one of the Hong Kong book stores, and that copy is an issue of Fall, 1946. Right after I have finished this copy, I went hunting again, and was lucky enough to pick up another copy, this an issue of 1947. That means so far I have read only two issues, and I am one year behind, but these copies are enough to convince me that they are full of thrills and action and hair-raising adventures.

I think G. Wyman Jones is a fine writer. So keep it up, Mr. Wyman Jones. The short stories are all right too, but the Black Bat is really on the ball. I think the D.A. Tony Quinn, Silk, Carol and Butch are a fine combination.

Some of the readers suggested that there should be a bit of love and romance between Tony and Carol. I vote for this idea. It would make it even more exciting. One of the readers suggested that they be married. This I think isn't so good. Anyway, it's tops with me, and from now on, I am going to read only BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE as far as detective novels are concerned. But my only disappointment is that it isn't easy to get hold of BLACK BOOK here in Hong Kong.

I am a Chinese, born in Malaya. So far I haven't seen a Chinese reader's name in the back page of the "Reader Letters". As far as I know I might be the first one.—Peter Kong, Transport Section, N.A.A.F.I., District Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China.

I have been reading your stories for quite a long time, and I think Tony should let Captain McGrath know he is the Black Bat. I had rather read BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE than any other. I also like Silk and Butch. They are all taking dangerous chances. They are all very, very brave.

I will be glad for Tony and Carol when they

get married. If I were Carol, I wouldn't let Tony out of my sight for one minute, Tony is really handsome in spite of his eyes.—*Clara Curtis, Only, Tenn.*

Let's have large pictures of Tony, Carol, Silk and Butch for us readers to paste up on the wall or frame.—*Dennis Sewickley, Jr., Mobile, Ala.*

I think a Seeing Eye dog would be fine for Tony.—*Joe Allen Foned, Brooklyn, N. Y.*

I like BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE very much. I have just read the Black Bat's latest story, INHERITANCE OF MURDER. It was the best of his adventures I have read for some time. I, too, believe Tony Quinn shouldn't be marrying anybody. He and Carol Baldwin should be kept single. It wouldn't be fair risking her life as well as his. I also think that Tony Quinn, the Black Bat, should put behind bars crooks and racketeers who cheat veterans out of their savings.—*Irvin Charles Greene, Winchester, Ky.*

I agree with Billy Leaverite. Love and smooching have no place in a detective story. Come on, you other readers. Don't you agree with me?—*Kim Clarkly, Baltimore, Md.*

Can you tell me the name of the first detective story that was ever written?—*Maybelle Carmer, Indianapolis, Ind.*

According to the records, the first modern detective story was MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE, by Edgar Allan Poe, written over a hundred years ago. Yes, the latest one—just hot off the typewriter of G. Wayman Jones—is THIRTY-ONE DEADLY GUNS, scheduled for our next issue, at which time we'll be back with many more letters. Hope yours is among them! Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you all next issue, and until then—good luck, everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

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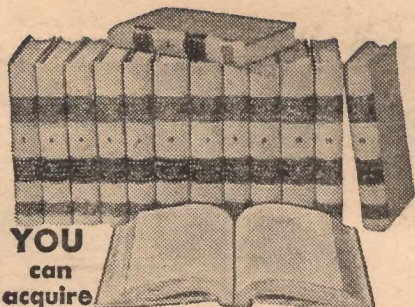
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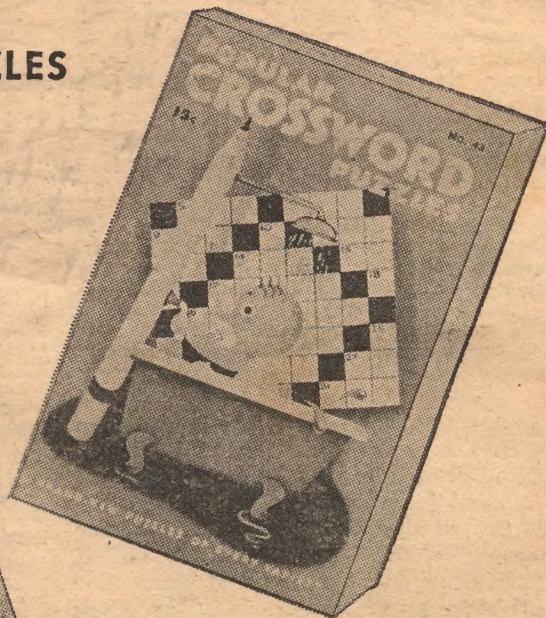
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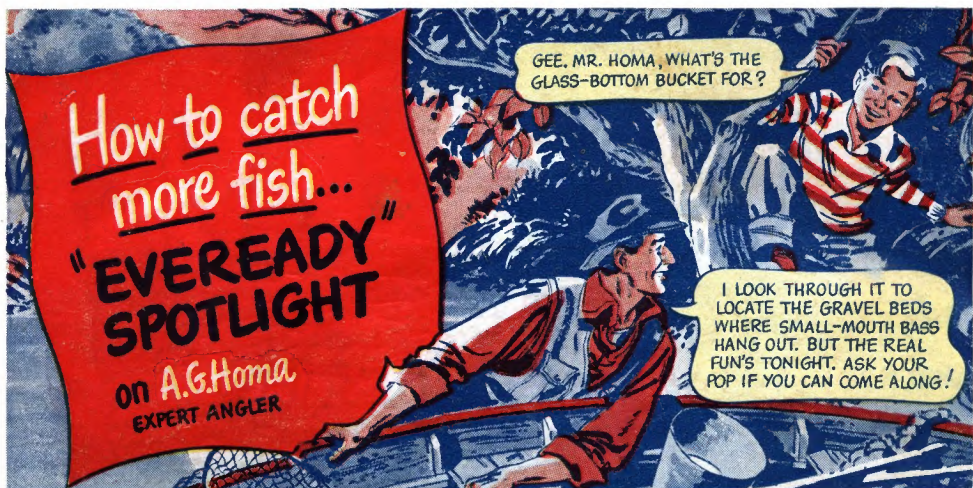
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